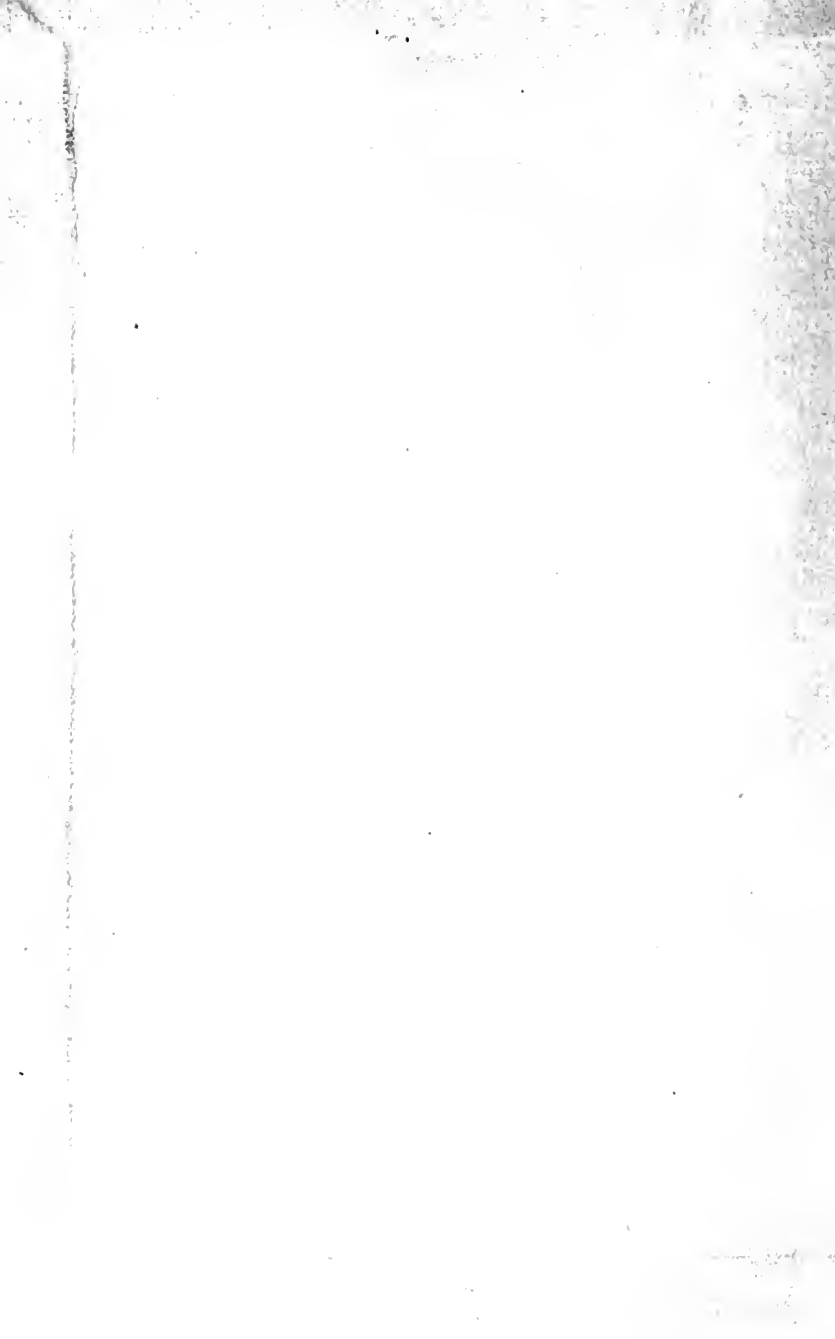


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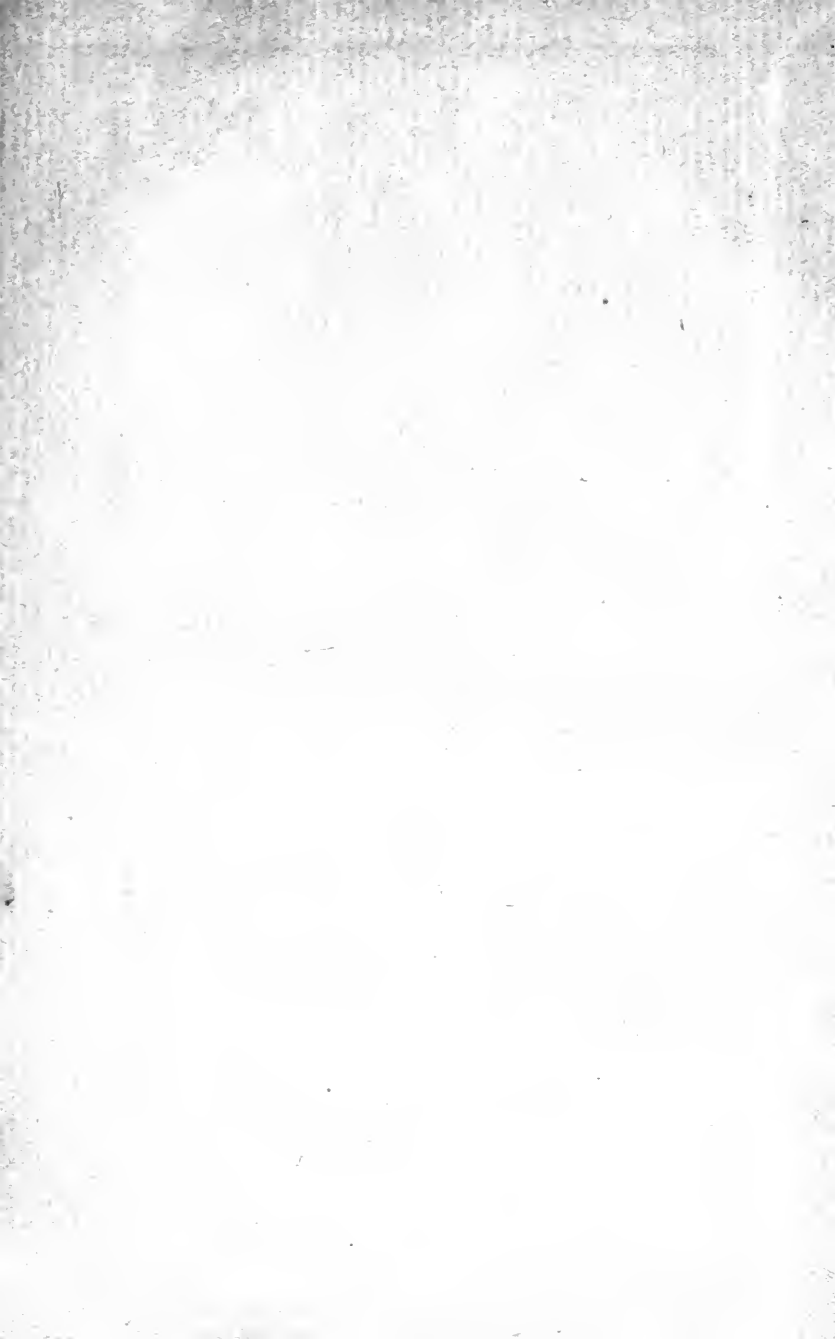


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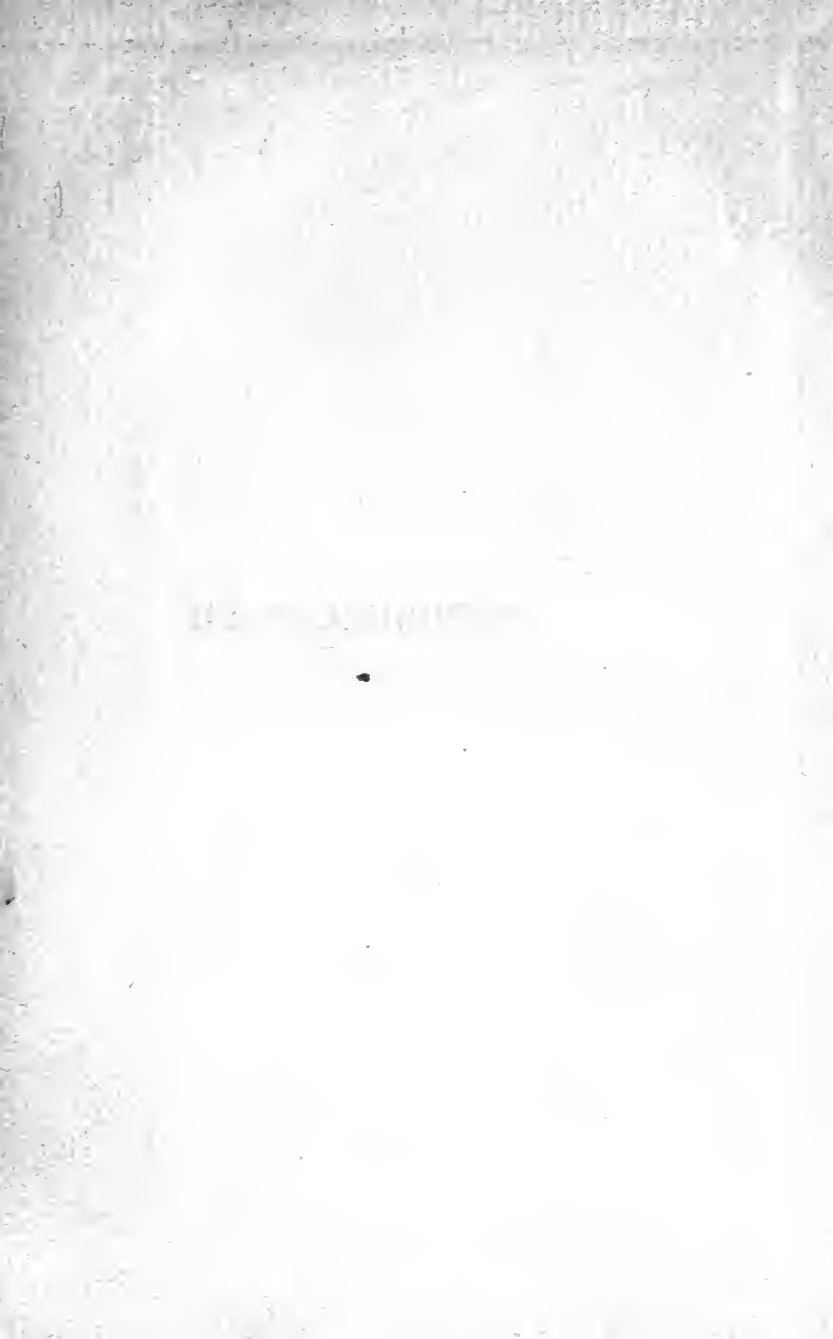
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THE GRASSHOPPERS







The Grasshoppers

Cecily (Ullmann) Sidgwick]

BY

MRS. ANDREW DEAN, pseud.

(Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick)

AUTHOR OF "ISAAC ELLER'S MONEY," "A SPLENDID COUSIN,"
"MRS. FINCH-BRASSEY," "LESSER'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

Illustrated by Walter B. Russell

*"La cigale, ayant chanté
Tout l'été,
Se trouva fort dépourvue
Quand la bise fut venue"*

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THE GRASSHOPPERS

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTERS.

WHEN Hilary Frere first expressed a wish to go to college her mother wept. Mrs. Frere had not trained up her daughter to walk in such a path as this. She had never seen any of the women's colleges, nor had she ever known a person who lived in one, nor was she in the habit of reading anything more about them than the chance paragraphs that appear in the daily papers and the fashion books. Nevertheless, like many others of her generation, she cherished a lively dislike of these institutions. The very name of one still sends an unpleasing thrill through the frames of many respectable and otherwise intelligent persons. It conjures up a vision of womanhood with the graces left out. It suggests an aggressive creature brimful of the knowledge to be gathered from text-books, and lacking the modesty that recognizes a yet wider, deeper knowledge in other people.

Moreover, Mrs. Frere feared that collegiate life would have the same effect on a girl as a vow of celibacy. It would lead her to dress in a disagreeably conspicuous fashion. She would cut her hair short, take to spectacles, and burn her modish gowns; and it would fill her with the distrust of men and marriage that is fashionable among the glorified spinsters of to-day.

"The others will say they despise men, and then

marry the first one who proposes," wailed Mrs. Frere, "but if Hilary says so, she will act on it; and Hilary would make such a pretty bride."

Mrs. Frere, like many a mother, lived in the hope of seeing her two girls married; and the wish in her kind heart proceeded from her sincere belief in the advantages of married life. She was not by any means without a little common worldly ambition. She would far rather have seen her children married to rich men than to poor ones; but she would confess without much pressure, and without any shame, that in her opinion almost any existence as a married woman was preferable to a state of single blessedness. She was, in short, a person of antiquated views, who would probably have told you that marriage and motherhood ought to be the end and aim of a woman's life. Her beliefs were behind the times, but they were complimentary to her husband.

Mrs. Frere was a German. Twenty-five years ago she had arrived in England with no fortune but her good looks, her foreign tongue, and a pretty touch on the piano. She spent a couple of years in imparting all she could of these advantages to the daughters of Mr. Theodore, a wealthy merchant, and then she accepted an offer of marriage from Richard Frere, a junior partner in her employer's firm.

Mr. Frere married for love, and he got what he wanted. He and his wife clung to each other with an affection that the passing years seemed to foster and strengthen, as time fosters and strengthens other healthy, natural growths. Money the years did not bring him, and for this his beloved wife was in part responsible. But even the anxieties of his position, and Mrs. Frere's failure to appreciate them, could not do much to trouble his affection for her. About most items of their expenditure husband and wife disagreed; and it is a pleasing fact that this constant disagreement had only a superficial influence on their regard for each other. Such are the advantages of inconsistency.

There was, however, one form of expenditure in which both of them delighted. They were equally determined to deny their children nothing. Mrs. Frere's indulgence spent itself chiefly on amusements, clothes, and toys. Mr. Frere made a point of paying as much as possible for his daughters' education. It was his way of providing for their future. Mrs. Frere's way was still more simple. The girls would marry young, and marry well, she said, and there would be an end of all perplexity. The next few years would bring this about, and, if more money than usual was spent on dress and hospitality, Mr. Frere must not grumble. She besought him to keep an easy mind and a light heart until the rice had been thrown after Nell and her bridegroom. Then the two old people could settle down as quietly as Mr. Frere liked and enjoy the sunset of life side by side. Her husband used to smile at his wife's pictures of their children's triumphs and of the silver honeymoon they two would pass together. But his anxieties were too real to be dispelled by pleasant prophecy. He was pitifully eager to give his children anything he could in the shape of a hold on the world.

Nell's endeavors to improve herself were never displeasing to her mother. She had a fancy for modern languages ; she danced well ; and, aided by expensive masters, she made the most of a pretty little voice. Even her rivals called her a clever girl. When the banjo came into fashion she learned to play it at once, and she could dance in an accordion-pleated skirt as soon as that was the proper thing to do. She had quite a genius (her friends said) for painting flowers on any background in vogue. Sometimes it was the panels of a door ; once it was the ceiling, and that made her mother nervous. Lately it had been drain-pipes. In a country town she would have been the prop of the bazaars.

Hilary was very unlike her sister, and she was at once the pride and the despair of her mother's heart. At school she worked hard and did well, and this

greatly gratified Mrs. Frere, who never realized that her child's proficiency in English was not as strange and commendable as it would have been in herself. But when Hilary left school her mother did not see why she should trouble any further about the pursuit of knowledge. A few singing lessons, a fancy for water-colors, the translation of *I Promessi Sposi*, or even a course or two of scientific lectures—such last touches to a girl's education Mrs. Frere could understand ; but it vexed her to see the child light up over a volume of Ruskin, and yawn in the dressmaker's parlor. And why should she work at Greek and mathematics? In these days, when eligible husbands are few and far between, it behooves a girl to be careful lest she should frighten one away. Moreover, the Greek characters might injure her eyes ; and if she spent her mornings indoors "doing mathematics," she would certainly lose her complexion. These recondite studies were unpraiseworthy, but even they were not as inconvenient as a fit of "slumming" that made Hilary late for meals, and eventually gave her the measles. Mrs. Frere said she could not allow it to go on. It endangered their lives, upset the house, and put the servants out of temper. If Hilary wanted to be charitable she might give away some of her pocket money.

None, however, of Hilary's most tiresome vagaries had been as displeasing to her mother as the last one. In the dawn of her youth and beauty she wished to renounce the world and shut herself up in a woman's college. Mrs. Frere implored her child to stay at home and gather rosebuds while she might. She reminded Hilary that her eighteenth birthday had come and gone, and that time was flying. But Hilary kissed her mother, and coaxed her father, and as usual got her own way. After overcoming just enough resistance to enhance her self-respect, she departed, full of curiosity and hope, to try a new manner of life at St. Cyprian's.

After her first term Hilary came home full of new

tastes and opinions that in one sense gave Mrs. Frere much satisfaction. They enabled her to say to her husband, "I told you so"—a form of revenge that all men tell us is exceedingly dear to the feminine heart. Hilary had not burned her fashionable gowns, but she said that they were vulgar. She had not cut off her beautiful hair, but she wore it brushed away from her face and twisted into a rough shapeless lump at the back. She bought shoes and gloves that were too large and too thick, and with the most incapable of fingers she trimmed her own hats. On all the great questions of the day her opinions were feverishly decided. It must be owned that even Nell, easy-going, good-tempered Nell, found her sister a trying companion at this critical period of her growth. There was never any telling what Hilary would swear at or swear by next. Of course Nell's smart clothes came under the ban. So did most of her friends and all her occupations. And Nell, who was not without perception, noticed that Hilary rather made a point now of being bored by most company, and of discovering that nearly everyone she met was ridiculous. To Nell it seemed that this habit was not a sign of either a great heart or a great wit, and that the sooner Hilary cast it off the better.

On the whole, this little crop of affectations was the most visible fruit to her own people of Hilary's first term at college. But they soon discovered that at the end of each term the crop had changed a little, and generally for the better. In the course of three terms she had seen the vanity of several "isms" and cast them aside. At Christmas she had come home with "Walden" in her trunk and contempt in her soul for material comforts. In her soul the contempt flourished finely for a fortnight, but the weather turned cold and her body inconveniently rebelled. She had refused a fire in her own room, and had lived on bread and potatoes for a week. So she fell ill, and was ordered sweet-breads and champagne.

She had brought a friend with her who was as rude to Mrs. Frere and Nell as *Mr. Stiggins* was to *Mr. Weller*. She showed them very plainly that in her opinion they were vessels of wrath. At Easter Hilary arrived with a Norwegian dictionary and another friend, who said Ibsen had knocked Shakspeare into a cocked hat. The two young ladies spent the vacation discussing the marriage laws and a pamphlet that should bring about their amendment. But the pamphlet never got written, because one day a young man called on Hilary's friend and proposed to her. She came upstairs in a state of happy excitement from her interview with him, and said she must go to the Army and Navy stores that very afternoon and order her trousseau, as "he" had to sail for India in no time and wished to take her with him. Mrs. Frere liked that girl, and gave her a handsome wedding present.

After this Hilary did not bring many of her college acquaintances home with her. She was somehow often most attracted by the poor ones who dressed shabbily and looked forward to making their own living. Her father's friends were flourishing business people, luxurious in their habits, extravagant in their expenditure. They considered her a girl of eccentric tastes, and she considered some of them dull, commonplace, and respectably corrupt. Her work at college led to nothing much. At the end of her third term she had made very little of her text-books; but she had gained some experience of a society that does not attach quite as much value to money as the one in which she lived. She had seen people deeply interested in other pursuits and problems than the race for gold and the display of it. She had made friends with women who spent less in a year on clothes than Mrs. Theodore did on a single gown, and were nevertheless content and highly honored. New ideas fermented in her,—some extravagant and foolish, some wholesome,—to be discarded or developed as she grew older. When she packed her trunks at

the end of the May term she came across her notes for the pamphlet on the marriage laws. She thought it would be a pleasant holiday task to expand them. On the subject of men and marriage her opinions were still fully formed. On the subject of clothes her taste had changed again.

CHAPTER II.

SHOPPING.

MRS. FRERE and Nell had been shopping all the morning. They had left home directly after breakfast, for they had seen at an early hour that the day would be fine, and that it would be pleasant to spend it out of doors. The inside of a London shop will not seem to everyone an attractive place in which to pass any part of a bright June morning. But these ladies were town born and bred. To them summer brought few country memories, and no wish for other sights and sounds than those of the London streets. Of course they liked a fine summer. It was dry under foot and fair over head. In such weather they could linger near the shop windows or in one of the parks. If they felt hot they sought the shade; if they were thirsty they ate an ice.

Nell thought she had never seen the shops so tempting. Her mother and she had spent a good deal of money already, and they still had purchases to make. Nell wanted a hat and Mrs. Frere a bonnet. It was difficult to choose among so many, and it ended in Nell taking two and spending twice as much as Mrs. Frere said she could afford. But the black one was necessary, and Nell looked so bewitching in the big brown one that her mother could not bear to leave it behind. Besides the hats there were shoes and gloves to get, and a bit of real lace for Nell's new dinner gown. Mrs. Frere never liked her children to follow the fashion of wearing imitation lace. She thought it as undesirable as electro-plate instead of silver, or cotton instead of linen. But real Alençon is costly, especially when you choose the

most expensive pattern. Nell persuaded her mother to take it by reminding her that it is always economical to buy the best. Mrs. Frere prided herself on her economy.

The ladies lunched at the Autolycus. Just a roast fowl and half a bottle of claret, and a meringue for Nell; a frugal little meal that nevertheless cost about a sovereign. Mrs. Frere did not drink cheap wine, and she ordered asparagus without noticing that the price on the bill of fare was very high. Somehow, though she was not a young woman, she was liable to these surprises. After lunch they drove to Marshall & Snellgrove's. They had an account there, a plan that reduces the anxiety of shopping to a minimum. It is, in fact, all centered in that unpleasant moment, once in six months, when the bill comes in. Instead of painfully considering the price of each separate article, and sometimes choosing a cheaper one, or even doing without it, Mrs. Frere and Nell spent all their time and trouble on finding what best pleased them. They were occupied with the realization, not with the cost of their desires. In this way, as I have said already, Mrs. Frere frequently prepared surprises for herself. The half-yearly bills were full of them. Still she complacently maintained that she was an economical woman. She declared with truth that she only bought what she wanted, and when her husband accused her of spending more than he could afford, she begged him to point out exactly which article he considered superfluous. I need hardly say that in such arguments it was the lord and master who retired worsted.

"If we are to have a dance," said Mrs. Frere to Nell, "we had better buy something for Hilary to wear."

"Oh, yes, mother!" said Nell anxiously. "Remember what she looked like at Mrs. Theodore's dance in those bath towels."

Hilary's present style of dress was a sore trial to her mother and sister. She had come up for a day last

month in order to be present at one of Mrs. Frere's afternoon receptions, and she had appeared on this occasion in a bright brown velveteen, villainously cut and made. In a room full of well-dressed people she looked conspicuous and absurd, and Mrs. Frere very naturally felt vexed. She thought that Hilary showed a want of sense, and even of refinement, in attracting public attention by her eccentric clothes. But many of Mrs. Frere's opinions were so antiquated that one hardly likes to repeat them.

"You must ask for yellow, mother," prompted Nell, as they walked toward the department they required. "Hilary is sure to want yellow."

"It is such an ugly color," complained Mrs. Frere.

"Oh, no, mother! Look at this."

The man serving them had brought forward a soft silky material, shot in all shades of yellow from cream to crocus. He set it up in folds, gave it a little pat, and mentioned that it was new and inexpensive.

"I want something inexpensive," said Mrs. Frere.

He told her the price. It was three times as much as she wished to give. The man saw her hesitate, and pushed aside some inferior goods as unworthy of her notice. Mrs. Frere felt quite flattered, and ordered a generous length to be sent to her French dressmaker that afternoon.

This business accomplished, the mother and daughter made some trifling purchases and then drove home. They were tired, but well satisfied with their day's work. Nell was particularly pleased with a fan that she had seen just as she left the shop, and which had only cost a guinea.

"I asked the price this time, mother," she said. "Don't you remember how vexed father was at Christmas about the feather fan that I took without knowing it cost five guineas. He will not mind one guinea, will he?"

"I don't know, my dear," sighed Mrs. Frere. "He seems to mind everything. I am sure I am as saving

as I can be, but he expects me to keep house and dress myself and you on nothing."

Nell made no reply. Ever since she could remember, money had been a sore subject between her father and mother. It was the one cause of dissension in their affectionate household, and the disputes about it were unpleasant and well worn. The young people avoided a topic sure to come in one way or the other to a miserable end.

It was nearly six o'clock when they reached St. John's Wood, and as they pulled up at their own door they saw Mr. Frere letting himself in with his latch-key. He was a gray-haired, elderly man, rather under the average height, sparely built, and thin. His features were refined, and though, on the whole, you would have called his face a plain one, you would have said that his eyes were likeable. You could not imagine them looking unkindly on anyone; and they were intelligent eyes. But there was a troubled look in his face, and the deep lines on it were lines of anxiety. This afternoon, when he had taken off his coat and hat, he walked slowly upstairs to the morning room on the first floor. His wife and daughter had hurried there before him because, as the front door opened, they saw Hilary's big trunk in the hall. So they knew she had arrived from St. Cyprian's, and they hastened to welcome her, and to note without any loss of time the latest changes in her costume and her opinions. They could reckon on changes, but not on the direction of them.

Strangers who saw the sisters together usually said that they were very much alike; and in some respects there was, no doubt, an obvious resemblance. Both girls were slenderly built, of average height, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and pale. They both had small feet and pretty, useless-looking white hands; their dimples matched, and so did their voices. There were tricks of manner common to both, and now and again a striking likeness of expression would bear witness to their sisterhood. But as acquaintance with

them grew the resemblance, at first so striking, gradually faded. Nell's good humor was irresistible. It was proof against the dullest company. Youth itself seemed to enter the room with her—youth in the best of spirits, well satisfied and easily entertained. Hilary, on the contrary, was often out of spirits, because, like many people of her years, she felt sure that the world was in a parlous state, and that it behoved her to better it. As a preliminary, she tried to better herself, which shows, at any rate, that she was ahead of some more accredited reformers.

This afternoon her mother and sister stared at her in surprise. Since their last meeting Hilary's appearance had undergone a startling alteration. The obnoxious velveteen had vanished, so had the home-made hat and the clumsy boots.

"Hilary!" exclaimed her sister, "how trim you look. What have you done to yourself?"

"Tell me, Nell," said Hilary, in a solemn voice, "are these sleeves right?" and she gave them a pull at the shoulder to show what she meant.

"Where is that velveteen?" asked Nell, and she in her turn completed her question with a brief dumb-show that described the sloppy, slovenly garment after which she inquired. Hilary looked rather annoyed.

"I gave it away," she said. "But do answer, Nell. I see no clothes at college. Are these sleeves right? and this skirt? Is it narrow enough? I am so afraid it is not. Why have you done your hair so low on your neck? Is mine too high? I hope you like my hat."

She walked slowly to a mirror over the fire-place, looked at her reflection there, and then turned round to greet her father as he came into the room.

"You look very well, my dear," he said affectionately.

Mrs. Frere and Nell had taken off their outdoor things and thrown them down anywhere. The center table and some of the chairs were littered with parcels. When the maid came in with tea she hardly knew where to put the tray. But the room, in spite of its

present disorder, looked pleasant and comfortable. It was large, light, plainly furnished, fragrant with spring flowers. The windows opened on a roomy veranda that overlooked neighboring gardens as well as the one belonging to the house. On this warm June evening the birds were singing in a rapture. The din of London sounded far away. The air came in lilac-laden from the trees in full flower below.

"But why have you given away the velvet?" said Mrs. Frere, who felt bewildered by her daughter's sudden amazing interest in the shape of a sleeve.

"It was badly made," said Hilary.

"Then why did you wear it at my At Home?"

Hilary did not answer her mother's question. She looked a little bit guilty, got up and helped herself to cake, and said, as she sat down again, "It is *so* important to dress well. Not really, you know, but because people are so silly. They will not listen to us if we look dowdy."

"Listen!" said Mr. Frere. "You are not going to talk from the housetops, I hope, my dear. I don't approve of women speaking in public."

"Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know, my dear. I like domestic women and all that. Besides, what can you want to say?"

Hilary's eyes, which were usually rather solemn, twinkled for a moment with amusement. She sipped her tea, let the subject drop, and then, after a sufficient pause, started a new one.

"So we are going to have a dance?" she asked. She addressed her father, who looked as much startled as if she had struck him. From behind his chair Nell made reproachful grimaces at her sister, and Mrs. Frere said:

"Nothing is decided, my dear. Father has not given his consent yet. In fact, I had not mentioned it; had I, Henry?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Frere. "And I wish you would not now."

"We must give one, you know," said Mrs. Frere, in her placid, comfortable voice. There were no lines of anxiety on *her* face. She always said that if only people would take things easily, as she did, they would get on in life, as she had hitherto done.

"A dance at home is such fun," said Nell, perching on her father's chair, and putting her arm round his neck.

"It needn't cost much," hazarded Mrs. Frere. "We make our own jellies."

"It always does cost a great deal," said Mr. Frere.

"Well, papa, dear," said Nell, stroking her father's hair, "you know you like spending your money on Hilary and me. You always say we are to have everything we want, and I am sure we want a dance."

"Besides, we must do as other people do," said Mrs. Frere.

"Other people do not spend more than they can afford."

"Really, my dear," said Mrs. Frere, in an aggrieved voice, "if you can suggest any possible retrenchment, I shall be very glad. We must have food and clothes, and that is about all we do have. We keep no carriage, we have no men servants. I never ask you for jewelry. The truth is, you lose a thousand pounds in the City, and then complain because I spend twenty in the house."

"What can I do if I haven't got the money?" said Mr. Frere, who was rapidly losing his temper.

"Oh, you have a good business. The girls will soon be married, and then we shan't want much."

Hilary got up. Her face showed plainly enough that her mother's last remark offended her.

"I think I will go and unpack," she said.

"Hilary does not like your prophecies, my dear," said Mr. Frere. "She means to stay at home."

His wife sighed, and when the girls had left the room together, she exclaimed, "How I wish that Hilary had never gone to college!"

"I don't," said her husband. "If ever she wants to earn her living——"

"Really, Henry, you are as bad as she is. Earn her living, indeed! I hope my girls will never think of such a thing. Such pretty girls as they are—they are sure to marry well. Of course, if we are always croaking and looking at the dark side of things, we shall have no luck. But that is not my way. Let the future take care of itself. I call it downright wicked to be always spoiling the children's pleasure, and making them uncomfortable, just when their lookout is so brilliant too."

Mr. Frere stared at his wife in astonishment, but she nodded and blinked at him in a manner full of meaning.

"My girls are great favorites," she said.

"Oh! is that all?" said her husband, picking up the day's paper and unfolding it.

"How very provoking you can be, Henry!" complained Mrs. Frere. "What more do you want? Nell is as good as engaged to Arthur Preston, and Herr Hansen took the greatest interest in Hilary's photograph. Since I showed it to him he always asks after her."

"I would far rather hear Dick Lorimer ask after her."

"You don't aim high enough for your daughter, Henry. I always notice that. Dick Lorimer is very well, but Herr Hansen is a rich man."

"Settle it your own way, my dear, if you can," said Mr. Frere.

He never much enjoyed these discussions of his daughters' admirers. He thought to himself, as many another man has before him, that the ways of women are beyond the masculine understanding. Why should such a simple-minded woman as his wife prefer Herr Hansen to Dick Lorimer simply because he had more money?

CHAPTER III.

HERR HANSEN.

MRS. FRERE said that she did not give dinner parties, and in one sense this was true. She hardly ever put extra leaves into her table. But it is quite as expensive to prepare a dainty repast two or three times a week for a couple of young men as to entertain a dozen old fogies once in a way. The Freres kept open house, and an inn where no bills are presented costs its supporters money. Mrs. Frere was loyal to her traditions, and considered the palates of her guests in a degree undreamed of nowadays by an Englishwoman. And some of her pets were very uppish about their food. Hamburg people stew their hams in champagne, baste their venison with cream and butter, and stuff their poultry with truffles.

"Such a misfortune!" she exclaimed, as she burst into the morning room one afternoon, about a week after Hilary's return from college.

Hilary looked up from her books inquiringly.

"The crayfish have come," panted Mrs. Frere.

"Oh!" said Hilary.

"They are bad. What shall I do?"

"Throw them away."

"My dear child! I have promised Herr Hansen to have *bisque* for dinner. The servants are all so busy. Would you mind going round to the nearest fishmonger and telling him to send a big lobster at once? I suppose you would rather not bring it with you? Of course, lobster is not crayfish. I know Herr Hansen will find it out. It is a real misfortune."

"Is he so greedy, then?" asked Hilary, who had not seen her mother's new phoenix yet; but Mrs.

Frere did not hear the question. She had seen a speck of dust on a photograph frame, and was hunting in the writing-table drawer for a duster with which to remove it. She kept an embroidered one handy for emergencies, but Nell borrowed it sometimes and forgot to put it back again.

Hilary took her books upstairs, and got ready to go out. She found it almost impossible to accomplish any steady reading at home. Nell's constant strumming disturbed her a good deal, and Mrs. Frere's domestic confidences still more. She reckoned that she might have translated a whole act of the "Hecuba" while she listened to her mother's reasons for thinking the cook wasted the butter. It did not take long to go round to the fishmonger, and when she came back she sat down to her books again. This time she remained in her own bedroom; but she had hardly read ten lines when Nell came in from a happy day at Shoolbred's, her hands full of little parcels.

"I am so tired," she said, sinking into an easy-chair. "I have told them to bring me some tea up here. What are you going to wear to-night, Hilary?"

"I don't know," said Hilary, debating with herself as to whether she should ask Nell to drink her tea elsewhere; but before she had made up her mind a maid came in with a little tray that she placed at Nell's side. Hilary looked ruefully at her Liddell and Scott and shut it.

"Your pale green suits you best," said Nell.

Hilary got up and surveyed herself in the wardrobe glass. Then she opened a drawer and took out the gown.

"After all," she said undecidedly, "what does it matter to-night?"

"You can never tell," said Nell.

Hilary did not like the implication underlying this remark, but she made no comment on it; and when she dressed for dinner she put on the green gown. It was pale and transparent, and cunningly made. It seemed to hang in straight folds from her throat,

and yet it did not hide the lovely lines of her figure, nor did it quite cover her neck and arms. Herr Hansen, who had come early, stared at her in amazement as Mrs. Frere presented him. Except for the color of her gown, and for her neatly shod feet, the girl might have stepped straight from "The Golden Stairs"; and whether or not you think Burne Jones paints beautiful women, he certainly shows you a type uncommon in German mercantile society. Herr Hansen's first idea was that he did not admire it. He liked a stout, rosy-cheeked maid with a full bust, a tight waistband, and an engaging giggle; and he had been brought up to think that a woman who did not copy her dress from the fashion-plates must be either an actress or a lunatic. He reminded himself, however, that he was in England. Germans talk of a mad Englishman as we talk of a canny Scot.

"So you are the learned young lady," he said, sitting down heavily beside her.

"Am I?" said Hilary, wondering how her mother could admire his appearance or describe him as a fine-looking man. There was certainly a great deal of him, and with many people quantity seems to count. Hilary, like most women, thought that men should by rights be tall, but she required something more than mere height and size. Herr Hansen's figure was shocking to English prejudices. He was corpulent. He had rather fine blue eyes, an unremarkable nose, a high color, and a great deal too much dark hair. His locks, his beard, and his whiskers would all have been the better for pruning. He wore a frock coat that was too tight for him, a crimson tie, and trousers of a pronounced fancy pattern, probably recommended by his tailor as genuinely English.

"In Germany young ladies do not go to the university," he continued, evidently under the impression that he was communicating a fact unknown in England.

"Not yet," said Hilary.

"Never," said Herr Hansen, "I assure you. Never!"

"Oh!" said Hilary civilly, but she could not continue the discussion because Dick Lorimer came in just then, and, after shaking hands with Mr. and Mrs. Frere, caught sight of her. They had not seen each other for five years, and until dinner was announced they were both fully occupied in observing the outward changes made by time.

"You had short frocks," said Dick, looking at Hilary's train.

"Yes," said Hilary, with her eyes fixed on Dick's mustache. When he went away it had not been slightly grizzled.

"You wore your hair down your back."

"I did." Hilary glanced at Dick's forehead as she spoke. In five years his hair had receded, and at the top it was thin.

"You are much taller."

"Yes, and you are not. I am up to your shoulder now."

"Hardly."

Memory on memory crowded into their minds as their speech stumbled into a more familiar key. In spite of the seven years that separated them they were old friends. Dick's father had represented the firm of Theodore & Frere in Bombay. His liver killed him a year after the senior partner's death, and three months before he was entitled to a share in the business and a pension for his widow. Mr. Theodore, Jr., said that this was the fortune of war. The widow and her son must abide by it. Mr. Lorimer had died at a very inconvenient moment for the business; in fact, his demise, occurring when it did, probably cost the firm some thousands of pounds. Further expense on his behalf Mr. Theodore, who had lately married, would not incur. The widow and her son must help themselves and look heavenward rather than to Theodore & Frere for additional assistance. The widow drooped and soon died, after

which Dick had an income of seventy pounds all to himself. At this period of his life he was fond of rowing. He played billiards well, and he possessed a bull pup. Mr. Theodore said that such tastes were incompatible with a mercantile career, and when Dick asked his advice he waved him politely out of the private office. He had been greatly annoyed by Dick's refusal to accept a clerkship with a Jewish firm in Sierra Leone. To have your benefits forgotten is not so provoking as to have them refused with contumely. Moreover, Dick seemed to think his income a small one; and he said that he could not do a day's work on an empty stomach, even after hearing that Mr. Theodore's father had never afforded himself any lunch until he was earning a thousand a year. Finally, Mr. Theodore said outright that he would have nothing to do with Dick in business, though he would always be pleased to meet him in society.

Dick soon saw that it would be very difficult to make a start in London. The only business men he knew were known still better to Mr. Theodore, and went to him for the young man's character. Rowing, billiards, bull pups! A gentleman with such tastes may be asked into your drawing room, but not into your office.

But Dick had qualities that carry a man through many difficulties, and in Mr. Frere he found a steady friend. It was he who advised the young man to go to America, and who gave him some valuable introductions there. Dick did well from the beginning, and had come back at the age of twenty-seven with a small capital, the best of reputations, and every prospect of making his way in the world. He now said that he would always be pleased to do business with Mr. Theodore, but that he preferred not to meet him in society.

Dick's circumstances were not exactly easy yet. Mr. Frere, who knew his affairs, understood that he would have uncommonly little to spend for some

time to come. Nevertheless, nothing would have pleased him better than to see Hilary and Dick engaged. He was not as ambitious for his children as his wife was. Mere happiness would have contented him. She had set her heart on wealth and position. But then, as Hilary would have said, a woman plants her standard high.

At dinner Hilary sat between Herr Hansen and Dick. She had never been out of England, and had hardly ever eaten a meal in the society of a foreigner. Like all true Britons, she felt genuine contempt for those graceless persons whose habits differed from her own; and Herr Hansen's table manners gave her a succession of little shocks. The first thing he did was to tuck his napkin comfortably into his waistcoat. Hilary watched him as if she expected that he would proceed to tuck up his sleeves. He did not do that, but his neighbors could hear him lap his soup. He helped himself to extraordinary quantities of any dish that was handed round; he paid her mother compliments on every one that pleased him; and when his portion required a knife and fork, he cut the whole of it into good-sized pieces before he began to eat.

"This mayonnaise is very good," he said to Hilary. "Did you make it?"

"No," said Hilary, without expressing the surprise she felt.

"Could you make it?"

"No."

"Ah! that is a pity."

Hilary smiled faintly and drank a little champagne. Then she turned to Dick Lorimer, but he was discussing the boom in the South African market with her father. Arthur Preston and Nell were absorbed in each other, and now Mrs. Frere, observing Herr Hansen's silence, drew him into a prolonged discussion of the Hamburg *cuisine*. Hilary wished herself back at St. Cyprian's, where everyone dined in less than twenty minutes, and neither knew nor cared very much what they had for dinner.

The talk did not become general until a savory arrived that stirred Herr Hansen to comment on its excellence, and at the same time express his low opinion of English cooking. From the solemnity with which he spoke he might have been condemning our national morals. He said that he always went down in weight during his annual visit to this country. Arthur Preston, who spoke of himself as "up to date," glanced at Herr Hansen's figure and asked him if he did not find a course of semi-starvation wholesome. The good-natured German smiled and blinked and said that it might be wholesome, but he did not enjoy it. He put it to his hostess: Could anyone with a palate acquire a taste for mint sauce or, worse still, for rhubarb? He told her a long story that turned on his repugnance to rabbit, and his disgust when he found that he had eaten some unawares in a stew. Then Mr. Frere and Dick took up the cudgels on behalf of beefsteak, porter, and a roast duck stuffed with sage and onions. Foreign messes made them ill, they said. There was some sense in mint sauce and rhubarb, but who out of a nightmare wanted to eat raw herrings, raw ham, and vinegar with green pease. Herr Hansen said that Dick could not know Hamburg. Civilization and nature had combined to make that chosen town a center for epicures. The best goulash he had ever tasted had been dished up to him in a Hamburg hotel.

"Do you know Hamburg?" he said, turning to Hilary. "You should come there this summer."

"I think we are going to Switzerland," said Hilary.

"Switzerland is nothing. What can you do there? They make meringues—the Swiss cooks—and then they have finished. I know. I have been there."

Hilary sent her mother an imploring glance, to which Mrs. Frere replied by getting up from table.

"Herr Hansen talks a good deal about food," said Mrs. Frere apologetically. "People do in Germany, you know."

"It seems such a pity he wasn't born a pig," said

Hilary, going to the piano. "He would have been far happier."

Mrs. Frere looked distressed, but her reply was inaudible to Hilary, who had begun to play. Nell went out on the veranda, and before she had been there very long, Arthur Preston joined her. He was a good-looking young fellow, and the only son of moderately well-to-do people. His sentiment for Nell was plain to everyone, especially plain to his mother, who desired her son to make a wealthy match. It was a light and butterfly courtship, begun to a waltz tune, and growing more ardent as the summer days grew longer. They met at dances, at dinners, at the play. Of late he had come in two or three times a week for a game of tennis after his day on the Stock Exchange, and whenever Mrs. Frere asked him to stay and dine he managed to be disengaged. She could not understand why he had not long since settled matters; he was making a respectable little income she had heard. She did not know that he spent every penny of it, and could not think of marriage with a dowerless wife. In fact, he did not think of marriage at all just yet. He wanted to enjoy his bachelor life to the dregs. This summer his flirtation with Nell gave it an agreeable zest. He assured himself that he was immensely in love with her, and he tried his best to convince her of it too. Everyone who knew them said they expected a speedy invitation to the wedding; but those who knew Arthur best did not mean what they said.

This evening the two young people sat together on the veranda for a few minutes, and then they descended to the garden, where for the next half hour they appeared and disappeared like *Faust* and *Margaret* among the trees.

When the other men came away from the dining room they found Mrs. Frere fast asleep in an easy-chair, and Hilary by herself on the veranda wrapped in a fluffy white shawl. Dick Lorimer managed to reach her first and sit down by her side. Herr

Hansen stood within the window and talked to his host in German. Presently they too descended to the garden and walked slowly up and down the lawn, lighting fresh cigars and talking of business matters in high voices that sometimes fell to a significant whisper.

Hilary had always liked Dick Lorimer. She thought she might like him better than ever now that through her advance in years they could meet on equal terms. It was a little bit disappointing to find as she talked to him that he had not stood still, that he was even yet ahead of her. Half a decade, that to her had brought such great and weighty changes, seemed also to have done a good deal for him. He had arrived with strides at manhood. Hilary envied him the lines in his face. They had been graven there by experiences that help to crystallize and to mature. His eyes were as keen and good-humored as ever, but his manner was more assured.

What did they talk of as they sat together and watched the moon rise high above the tall elms at the bottom of the garden? Certainly most of the pleasant talk in which we share, to which we listen, would not bear writing down. Besides, consider how small a part spoken words play in any conversation. You pick up the threads of an old friendship with the aid of your manners, your voices, your eyes, your smiles and frowns? Who stops to give more than its due to a tongue? Dick and Hilary told each other where they had spent the years, and, in a bare, colorless way, what they had been doing the while. Hilary mentioned St. Cyprian's, spoke of her schooldays, talked of her best girl friend; and all this Dick had clean forgotten by the following morning. What he remembered was that she had grown tall and slim and lovely, and that her eyes were like stars, and that her voice was sweet and sometimes quaintly solemn, and that she still looked rather childlike. Her eyes had not lost their direct and candid gaze. He observed that she dressed outlandishly,

but that it somehow became her, and he thought she had not lost her old trick of talking nonsense. For instance, she asked him whether he saw any good reason why everyone should not be equally well off and at leisure, and she expounded a scheme for the accomplishment of this most desirable end that was very pretty and left out difficulties as naively as a dream or a fairy tale. Dick said something about the reform of the universe being a big job, and she got quite angry with him, because she said he implied that it was too big for her, and that he only said so because she was a girl. If a boy had proposed to undertake it, he would have at any rate listened with respect. Dick denied this last impeachment, and they had a lively quarrel, talked up and down the questions of the hour, and found themselves after a time almost on their former level of intimate friendship. For once Hilary's dilettante socialism had really done her a useful turn. They had fringed round a variety of subjects, and Hilary had just listened with an expression of horror to Dick's admission that he liked a day's shooting, when Mrs. Frere came out to them and said that it was time to have a little music. Would Dick tell Mr. Frere that the grass looked damp, and that everyone wished to hear Herr Hansen play?

Dick told both these lies like a man, and whether they came willingly or not, everyone soon reassembled in the drawing room. Hilary had not heard Herr Hansen play, and as her mother's manner pointed to something unusual she composed herself to listen with enjoyment. The very way his hands poised for a moment above the keys was full of promise, and directly they struck a few preliminary chords Hilary understood that the man was a musician. He began with a little *gigue* of Bach's that he played with brilliance and precision. He went on to Beethoven, and then, at Mrs. Frere's request, he played Chopin's great Polonaise in A flat major. The stir of it danced in Hilary's eyes as she thanked him. She

forgot that he had talked about food all through dinner. The crash of the great chords rang in her ears and sent the blood with a lilt through her veins. Everyone looked roused.

"You like music?" said Herr Hansen, with a pleased face, to Hilary. He was panting a little, and as he sat down near her he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "In England there is no music, is there?"

"Oh!" cried Hilary and Nell together. "No music in London!"

"You mean concerts. You must put on a black coat and a white shirt and drive three miles. I do not call that music. You hear Joachim, you say, and Paderewski. Yes. That is very fine, of course; but in Hamburg my friends come two or three times every week. We drink beer, we smoke, we take off our coats, and we play trios, quartettes, quintettes, what you will, for several hours. That is what I call music—what one makes at home in one's own rooms with a few good friends. So you find the great masters your good friends—in time."

Hilary began to like Herr Hansen in spite of his clumsy ways. One of those discussions arose between them that are often started by people of different nationalities, and gradually everyone present joined in it. Whether the English are musical or not is a question that will at any moment excite contradictory replies. Herr Hansen made no bones about his negative.

"I dined with some people yesterday," he said, "and after dinner they asked me if I liked music. I said 'Yes.' What else could I say? There were seven daughters, and they all sang to me."

Herr Hansen paused, overcome by his memories.

"The piano was out of tune. They did not mind that at all. They were all out of tune too. And the songs! *Mein lieber Gott!* Who makes these songs that your English young ladies sing?"

Hilary and Nell still maintained that you could hear

as much good music in London as anywhere else ; and Dick Lorimer, who did not know one tune from another, upheld them. Mrs. Frere assured Herr Hansen that her daughters talked without book. They did not know Germany. Some day they would go there and discover how superior it is in every respect to the land of their birth. Much to the amusement of her family, Mrs. Frere talked in this way now and then. She had lived contentedly in England for more than half her life, and she had reared her children to be English in habits, opinions, and prejudices ; yet she would now and then speak as if her adopted country was still strange and hateful in her sight. It did not mean much.

Nell said that she felt quite afraid to sing in Herr Hansen's presence ; but at Arthur Preston's request she went to the piano. While she was turning over her music, Herr Hansen said to Hilary in a confidential undertone :

"There is a good German opera at Covent Garden just now. Will you come with me ? On Saturday they give 'Lohengrin.' I will call for you, if you will permit it."

"Do you take out your friends' daughters in that way when you are in Hamburg ?" said Hilary, after some hesitation. He looked so unconscious of having suggested anything impossible that she did not like to refuse point-blank.

"In Hamburg ? No. A girl may not stir from her mother's side there. But in England and America it is different. And you—a so learned young lady. You will come ? In New York I took Miss Van Riesling three times ; and now she has married a Member of Congress. So, you see, what she did you may do."

"I'm afraid not," said Hilary. "We are quite behindhand here, you know. We are only remote islanders."

Herr Hansen looked dreadfully disappointed, until a new idea occurred to him and cheered him up.

"I will get a box," he said ; "then you will all come."

The plan did not commend itself to Hilary, who, along with her advanced ideas, cherished some prejudices that many of her contemporaries would have condemned as prim and Puritan. She was not fond of accepting pleasures from anyone but her father, and she knew that Mr. Frere shared her point of view. So she sent Herr Hansen to consult with him, well knowing that in this way the project would fall to the ground.

Directly Dick Lorimer saw his chance he strolled up to Hilary, and took the seat that Herr Hansen had just vacated.

"Shall we have a walk on Sunday?" he said. "In the old style?"

"Yes, yes," said Hilary delightedly, "in the old style."

"All right. I'll come round quite early."

"You have arranged with the others, I suppose?"

"Nell doesn't seem to care about it," said Dick, looking at his boots. "She says Preston is coming to play tennis."

"And papa?"

"Well—if his rheumatism is better. But you and I might go anyhow, Hilary ; such old friends as we are."

"Old enemies, you mean."

"It comes to the same thing," said Dick.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. THEODORE AT HOME.

MR. FRERE's present partner was a good deal younger than himself. He was an elder brother of the little girls who had once upon a time learned German and music from Mrs. Frere. His father, Mr. Lazarus Theodore, a German Jew, had clung with strong attachment to the ways of his youth. The son was over anxious to forget them. His father had left him a thriving business, which he carried on successfully, and a handsome fortune, which he soon doubled by clever speculation. At the age of thirty-three he married an English girl, whose acquaintance he made at a hydropathic hotel in Derbyshire. Mr. Theodore thought that the youngest daughter of a half-pay major would be economical in her habits; but he soon found that his wife spent money as if life was hardly long enough to compensate her for the privations of her early years. Luckily, even she could not keep pace with her husband's knack of raking money into his own till. They were a very flourishing couple. Mrs. Theodore stanchly upheld her husband in his resolve to forget his foreign origin. They spelled and spoke their name as if it had been an English one, and they avoided those old acquaintances who would not remember to utter the initial consonants softly, and to affix a final *e*. Mrs. Frere gave constant offense by her persistent use of the ancient spelling and pronunciation. It was one of many trifles that helped to widen a breach. The two men did not pull well together; but their wives fell out whenever they met, and often when they only corresponded. For this unfortunate state of things Mrs. Frere was chiefly

responsible. She took no pains to hide her small opinion of Mrs. Theodore; she treated her pretensions with disrespectful levity; and, ignoring the cue set by the younger lady, she sometimes chose to be plain-spoken instead of politely silent. After this admission, of course, no one will sympathize with Mrs. Frere. Plain-spoken folks are always a cross to their fellows, and one who is intimately acquainted with your family history is tolerably certain to make you uncomfortable sometimes. Mrs. Frere knew that Mr. Theodore's grandfather had kept a small shop in Hamburg, and she unkindly wondered what the old man would have said to Mrs. Stanley Theodore's court train. She did not ask the question aloud, but Mrs. Theodore saw it in her smile when she came to the train tea. Women do most of their hard hitting with smiles.

Hilary found, on her return from college, that Mrs. Theodore had invited them all to an At Home for the following Saturday, and that Mrs. Frere alternately bemoaned the necessity of going, and besought her daughters to make a creditable appearance there.

"Be sure and go to bed early the night before, dears, and take a little walk in the morning. It makes such a difference to the complexion. And don't use powder, Nell. Wash your face in cold water, and polish it with a chamois leather. I know Mr. Theodore wants his sister Sophia to marry Arthur Preston."

"Oh, well! mamma, don't worry. There are two to every bargain," said Nell cheerfully.

"That only shows how little you know of the world, my dear. Besides, there are three in this case: Mr. and Mrs. Theodore and Sophia. You don't suppose Arthur's consent is necessary."

"How old is Sophia Theodore?"

"Twenty-five. The other day Mrs. Theodore tried to make out that Sophia and Hilary were the same age, but I soon set her right. I said: 'My dear Mrs. Theodore, I was at her christening four years before my own marriage, and sixteen years before you and

your good husband met each other.' She did not like it at all."

"Then why did you say it, mamma?" inquired Hilary.

Of course, the Theodores lived in a very different style from the Freres. They inhabited one of those large new houses on the north side of Kensington Gardens that make such a good show for the money. Some of the most expensive houses in London are quiet and dull-looking; but the Theodore mansion was a big, white, shining witness to the owner's inexhaustible purse. As the Freres drove to the door, Hilary looked up at the front, which had just been redecorated. All the windows were gay with peacock-blue Minton tiles and pink geraniums. There was an awning over the first-floor balcony, and another from the front door to the edge of the pavement. A string of carriages blocked the way. Inside the house the crush was considerable already. Above the hum of voices Hilary heard a Hungarian band playing in a conservatory halfway upstairs, and scraps of conversation reached her with absurd incompleteness. She did not see anyone she knew.

Mrs. Theodore stood just inside the drawing-room door and received her guests. As the Freres went upstairs to present themselves to their hostess, Mrs. Frere nudged her eldest daughter:

"Another new gown," she whispered. "It doesn't suit her a bit."

Hilary raised her eyes, and was not at all astonished to see Mrs. Theodore most becomingly attired. She knew her mother's way of denying the little triumphs she felt inclined to grudge. Their hostess looked the very figure of fashion. Her shape, her features, and her inexpressive smile all lent themselves to the attainment of this great end. She was tall and angular, with a back as flat as a pastry-board, and a waist nearly as small as her neck. She had fair hair, elaborately curled and coiled, good features, and rather hard blue eyes. She stood bolt upright, moved very little, and

talked with a slight Yorkshire accent in a low contralto voice. As she talked her eyes wandered, so that the people who replied to her remarks usually felt uncertain whether their own were heard. She received Mrs. Frere without enthusiasm; the girls, who were prettily dressed, she greeted amiably enough. Mrs. Frere's gowns, it is true, had an air of being made two years ago. The cleverness with which she chose becoming raiment for her daughters never seemed to last out for herself.

"How full the room is!" she said, as she shook hands.

"The usual crowd," said Mrs. Theodore.

"Don't you find it tiring?"

"Very. But what can one do? I have nearly a thousand names on my visiting list. I have stood here since four o'clock. I can understand what the poor Princess feels like at the end of a Drawing-Room."

"Only you are not obliged to do it," said Mrs. Frere.

This was an indisputable fact, and yet it annoyed Mrs. Theodore to hear it brought forward by Mrs. Frere. The actual words did not vex her so much as the belittling of her social dignity that she heard behind them. With an air of dislike she turned away from the Freres and gave her attention to some new arrivals, one of whom proved to be Herr Hansen.

"Look, Hilary," whispered Mrs. Frere. "She means him to marry Sophia. I'm sure of it. He is very rich, you know."

"I don't see Sophia here," said Hilary, looking round the room.

"I do," said Nell, who was standing further in. "She is talking to Arthur Preston."

"I told you so," sighed Mrs. Frere.

Sophia Theodore was an exceedingly plain young woman who, in spite of her thirty thousand pounds, had reached the age of twenty-five without being married.

Proposals of marriage had, of course, been made to her and her comfortable little fortune, but not from eligible quarters. She was so very plain, poor girl! Formerly she had dressed badly, and displayed a clumsy figure, but of late her clever sister-in-law had taken her in hand. This afternoon, for instance, in an exquisite and becoming Parisian gown, she looked quite passable. In some miraculous fashion the milliners had turned her out almost slender. Nevertheless, you would not have expected to find that Sophia was a lion in Mrs. Frere's path. Of course, thirty thousand pounds deserves consideration. Every sensible man will admit that. But you must remember that most of the young men known to the Freres were neither idle nor poor. They were men of rather substantial fortunes, who by their own exertions made more than enough for their needs every year. A thriving merchant or stockbroker is not so much driven to run after a wife with a little money as a man whose income is limited and unlikely to increase. The daily pursuit of the yellow slave has its compensations. Your successful jobber can afford to marry for love, while the captain and the curate, when they tire of bachelor life, generally have to choose between love and money. It is a lucky man to whom one maid brings both. Mrs. Frere would gladly have seen Sophia marry a captain or a curate. She did not covet alliances for her daughters in the impecunious professions. Mothers have their fancies in these matters, according to their station in life and their personal characteristics. Some hanker after the cloth, and others after the scarlet. This woman expects a title with her son-in-law, that woman would like him to ply his own coster's cart. They are both women, and both ambitious—at opposite ends of the scale. Mrs. Frere had set her heart on a well-to-do business man, and whenever an eligible one made his appearance, she feared lest Mrs. Theodore should snap him up and throw him to Sophia.

By steadily moving on a step or two whenever the

crowd broke a little, the three ladies managed, in the course of half an hour, to get across the room. After a time, some people who were "going on" took their departure, and left two vacant chairs of which Mrs. Frere and Hilary gladly availed themselves. Before this happened, Arthur Preston had forsaken the redoubtable Sophia and invited Nell to come and eat ices downstairs. Hilary wished a friend would invite her to do likewise. The heat made her thirsty. Presently a little hubbub, and then a sudden hush, warned her that someone was about to entertain the company with a song or a recitation; and Mr. Theodore, who had just arrived, proclaimed in a loud voice that Miss Miranda Marshmallow would recite "Maud Müller." The audience pushed back a little, and a homely young woman came forward. For a moment she glared fixedly at nothing in particular, and then with a sudden swoop she swept her hands along the floor, as if she had dropped her gloves and was too short-sighted to see them. With this dramatic gesture she prepared the people to hear that "Maud Müller, on a summer's day, raked the meadow sweet with hay."

Inconsiderate people are fond of throwing ridicule on the pathetic reciter, but, after all, he has his uses. Most of us know what it is to walk away from the dentist with the bad quarter of an hour behind. Some trials are almost worth enduring for the sake of the joy that enters the soul when they cease. After angels, represented by Miss Marshmallow, had "rolled the stone from its grave away," everyone looked relieved and began to talk. A wave of extra cheerfulness succeeded the enforced silence of the last ten minutes, and the hostess had the pleasure of seeing all the guests in good spirits. She felt sincerely grateful to Miss Marshmallow.

"I do not understand," complained Herr Hansen, who had planted himself behind Hilary's chair some moments before the recitation began. "Why do all these people come here this afternoon? They do

not dance. They do not make music. They do not dine or sup."

"They come to see Mrs. Theodore," said Hilary. "They are her friends."

"She has many friends," said Herr Hansen reflectively. "Ah! I suppose these young ladies will sing a trio?"

There was a little flutter of excitement in the room just then, because three sisters, known to their cronies as Nipper, Dick, and Tommy, came forward and took their positions for a skirt dance. They were presently succeeded by a young lady, who had blackened her face and dressed in stripes to pipe a nigger melody to the banjo; and when she retired Mrs. Theodore's eldest son sang a coster song, with a chorus, in which numbers of his mother's guests were pleased to join.

"It is strange," said Herr Hansen. "In one corner of my invitation card there is printed 'Music.'"

"Yes," said Hilary, "this is it."

After the coster song, which was rapturously applauded, a good many people went away, and Mrs. Frere listened to Hilary's suggestion that they, too, had been there long enough. But before they could start, Nell must, of course, be found.

"She is sure to be near the ices," said Hilary. "I will fetch her."

As she walked away Herr Hansen dropped ponderously into the empty chair.

"Do you know that your daughter is a beauty?" he said to Mrs. Frere.

She was not offended, or even surprised. Praise from a man of his fortunes was praise indeed; and although Mrs. Frere had left her native country at an early age, she remembered how to converse engagingly with one of her countrymen.

"Hilary is not only beautiful," she said, "she is clever and good. When she is away from home we miss her dreadfully. And she trims her own hats."

"It is a pity she is learned. Why did you permit it?"

"I don't think her learning amounts to much," said Mrs. Frere, who was very far from knowing how truthfully she spoke. "Girls will have their fads and fancies. Before I married I devoted myself to music; but I soon found that my housekeeping books occupied more of my time than Beethoven's Sonatas."

If Mr. Frere could have heard his wife make this statement, he would probably have felt surprised; but Herr Hansen listened to it with attention.

"Is it really so?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Mrs Frère eagerly; "and Hilary is so economical, you know. She inherits that from me. She goes about among poor people, and teaches them how to save pennies, and eat cheap food, and buy plain clothes. At least, she did till some of them gave her the measles, and I stopped it."

Herr Hansen looked at Hilary with increased admiration when she returned to the room accompanied by her sister; and when Mrs. Frere asked him whether he could drive back with them and dine, he accepted the invitation at once. This arrangement seemed to give Hilary the most lively satisfaction, and she reminded Herr Hansen that he had promised to play Schumann's Faschingsschwank next time he came. As she crossed the room, Mrs. Frere heard him protest that he would play anything and everything Hilary wished to hear. A few steps ahead she saw Arthur Preston hanging about in evident hopes of an informal invitation. She managed to take both men back in her brougham, and she felt that, on the whole, the afternoon had not been thrown away. The sight of Mr. Theodore had, as usual, left a bad taste. He was a thin, light-haired man, with a curiously pale face, a flat, large forehead, and a contemptuous smile. Mrs. Frere complained that he sneered, and perhaps he did. He had a poor opinion of his partner's wife, and no reason whatever for concealing it. This afternoon, for instance, he had not troubled to speak to

her, or even to shake hands, until she passed him on her way downstairs. Then he inquired why her husband had not come, and smiled when Mrs. Frere explained that he was too busy.

"He ought to take a holiday sometimes," said Mr. Theodore.

"I wish he would. He works much too hard," said Mrs. Frere, with a sigh.

"You should persuade him to retire," said Mr. Theodore, with a smile that Hilary thought unpleasant. But his voice did not invite retort. It was languid, soft, and slow, and as he spoke he turned on his heel to speed some other parting guests. Mrs. Frere, with her two eligible bachelors for companions, enjoyed the homeward drive, and did not brood over Mr. Theodore's words until the following day. Then she worried over them as persistently as if they had been poetry, and she a commentator, finding in them applications, hints, and prophecies they would scarcely bear, and trying to interpret them with the help of all she knew about Mr. and Mrs. Theodore, their ancestors, their contemporaries, and their probable descendants.

CHAPTER V.

HERR HANSEN'S COATS.

MRS. FRERE received a slight shock on Sunday morning when Hilary came down ready dressed for her walk with Dick.

"I wonder what Mrs. Theodore would say if Sophia met a young man at a railway station and spent a day in the country with him?" she inquired.

"I've no doubt she would be horrified," said Hilary.

"Then why do you do it?"

"I am not Sophia, and Dick is not a young man. He is Dick."

"That certainly makes a difference," admitted Mrs. Frere. "Still——"

And she saw her child depart with a pang. No one will deny that it is exceedingly trying to have your fondest hopes raised one day, and dashed to the ground the next. Only the night before Mrs. Frere had gone to bed in the best of spirits, after assuring her husband that six weeks or so hence she would probably require about a thousand pounds for two trousseaux and a double wedding.

"I intend to buy all the house linen for both the girls," she said, as she placidly brushed her thick blond hair. "Herr Hansen will expect it, as he is a German; and although it is not the English custom, I dare say Arthur will be glad to have it given."

Some men, on hearing this, would have asked whether their daughters were actually engaged. Mr. Frere only said that he would be glad to turn out the gas.

"I should think that Mr. Preston would furnish a house for his son," continued Mrs. Frere. "They

would not want a large one, to begin with. Have you noticed those new red brick ones near Kensington High Street? I wish Arthur would be quick and speak."

In his own mind Mr. Frere did not much expect that Arthur would ever speak, and it annoyed him to see the young man always about the house. The intimacy had grown rapidly, and, as far as the head of the family was concerned, almost unawares.

"I think Arthur comes here too often," he said tentatively.

"My dear Henry! How is that possible?"

"People will begin to talk."

"Begin! They have talked all the winter. Are you blind and deaf? Everyone considers Arthur and Nell as good as engaged."

"Well, if that's what you like——"

"Of course, I like it. Coming events cast their shadow before."

"Your events are all shadow, I'm afraid. However I don't want to get rid of the girls, but I should like to go to sleep now."

"I am not a bit sleepy. My ears are full of the Appassionata. You must have noticed, Henry, that when Herr Hansen played the last movement—oh! very well. I won't say another word if you'll just tell me this: *does* his town house face the Alster?"

Mrs. Frere had not been in Hamburg for years, and at the date of her last visit she did not know Herr Hansen; but she had always known the name of the firm in which he was now senior partner. Hansen, Bopp, & Rössler. The very syllables had magic in them beclouding to the judgment.

When young people fall in love they are sometimes kept awake by pleasure, grief, or excitement; but Mrs. Frere lost part of her night's rest for the sake of her child. While Hilary slept like a top, her mother tossed from side to side and recalled the incidents of the last twelve hours. Herr Hansen had come straight up to them after making his bow to Mrs. Theodore.

He had stayed in their neighborhood all the afternoon. He had spoken unreservedly of Hilary's beauty, and listened with the greatest interest to an account of her other perfections. It is true he had eaten an excellent dinner. Mrs. Frere sighed as she remembered that he had taken a pigeon bone in his fingers to pick it with complete finish, and that, as he did so, Hilary turned rather red. But when a man has passed forty you do not expect anything but liver to destroy his appetite; and Hansen, Bopp & Rössler were above manners, just as the son of a duke may be, if he likes, in England. In Mrs. Frere's mind, Herr Hansen represented the great firm, even when he sat at her table eating *vol au vent* of pigeons.

That green gown certainly suited Hilary, but Mrs. Frere would never have foreseen its effect on Herr Hansen. If she had been consulted, she would have said, "On no account, my darling. Wear a square-cut black silk, have a neat head of hair, and lace as tightly as you can." But, of course, men as much sought after as Herr Hansen do grow capricious. They shilly-shally until middle age, and then they suddenly throw the handkerchief to someone unlike the ideal you feel sure they have hitherto set up. Hilary's behavior was even more surprising. Mrs. Frere would never have expected her child to make so little objection to Herr Hansen's figure and foreign ways. She could not plead blindness to his intentions, because, to prevent mistakes, Mrs. Frere had pointed them out quite plainly to both girls. It is true that Hilary had looked annoyed, and dropped some nonsensical remark about friendship being possible without an alloy of sentiment. Young ladies do say that kind of thing before a man declares himself. It means no more than the protestations of your enamoured bachelor who vows he will not marry.

On the whole, Mrs. Frere had been deeply gratified by the events of the day, and it vexed her to find next morning that Hilary meant to take herself off for a

walk with Dick Lorimer. She said something about the impropriety of it to her husband, but he refused to interfere, although he agreed that it would be awkward if Herr Hansen called this morning in a dress coat and white gloves, and with a bunch of flowers in his hand. Herr Hansen might not know that in England a man may make his offer of marriage in any coat he pleases, nor that it is the topsyturvy custom of the country to woo the child first and then the parents. It would really be very embarrassing for Mr. and Mrs. Frere if they had to hear proposals they would joyfully accept, and then see themselves forced to admit that their daughter was scampering over the country with another young man. In such a contingency *what* did Mr. Frere intend to say? Influenza? Really, Mr. Frere did not deserve to have wealthy sons-in-law if he would not make the smallest effort to receive them suitably. It was no use telling Mrs. Frere to use her own authority. He might as well tell her to use her wings.

Meanwhile, Hilary sent for a hansom, and started. She had promised to be at Victoria by ten o'clock, and it was all she could do to get there in time. She rather enjoyed shocking Mrs. Grundy as long as it could be done with inward comfort to herself; and she certainly was not going to shy at a Sunday walk with Dick just because they were no longer boy and girl. How many Sunday walks had they taken together five years ago? And Dick never talked sentimental nonsense. The juxtaposition, even in thought, of Dick and sentiment made Hilary smile.

He came forward as her hansom drew up at the station, and hurried her to the train. Somehow he had secured an empty carriage. They were only just in time.

"Where are we going, then?" asked Hilary. That Dick should plan the walk was quite in accordance with the ancient custom.

"I have taken single tickets to Dorking."

"Through the woods to Coldharbor, and on by Jacob's Walk and Friday Street to Abinger Hatch?"

"If you can walk as well as ever."

"Do you call that a walk? I plant my banner on snow and ice nowadays. We ought to meet in Switzerland, Dick."

"Do she-undergraduates eat sweets?"

"Well, sometimes. Oh! I wondered what that package was. Those French ones you used to bring? You have a very agreeable memory."

He watched her take off her gloves and untie the golden thread that bound the package. She looked up as she offered the sweets to him.

"Have you altered much?" she asked.

"My tailor says I have."

"Nonsense! I mean in important ways."

"I've given up Bass and taken to lager."

"Ah! you are just the same," she said regretfully; "never serious."

Dick felt inclined to retort that he was not a woman of leisure, with ample time for the consideration of those vast questions that seemed to occupy Hilary's mind. His life had been a hard uphill tussle. A man whose days are spent in eager buying and selling is apt to find his work tax enough on his faculties. In his leisure hours he is glad to rest. But face to face daily with the primitive interests and passions of human nature, Dick had learned, at any rate, how to bear himself bravely; how to use the weapons he needed; how to wring some measure of success from life. And yet this child, who had trodden on rose-leaves, complained that he was not sufficiently serious. She meant it, too.

"All right," said Dick cheerfully, "go ahead. What shall we talk about?"

"Oh! we can't talk like that," said Hilary, rather annoyed. "At least I can't. It must come naturally."

"What must?"

"Subjects."

Not if he could help it, Dick assured himself. But

aloud he said, "I wonder whether the old woman in Leith Hill Tower sells ginger beer on Sundays?"

Hilary laughed with a contented sound and continued to eat her sweets. Dick's remark, taken as an answer to her own, was certainly abrupt, and perhaps not calculated to excite discussion. This she recognized, and in some degree deplored. At the same time she felt persuaded that, if she got thirsty and asked for ginger beer, Dick by hook or by crook would get it; also that, if they met a mad bull, he would cause it to go away; also that he knew about roads and trains, and would lead her comfortably home again, and that, however willing she was to over-tire herself and suffer silently, he would not let her do anything of the kind. In Switzerland, last year, she had on one occasion been so dead beat that she lagged behind the others for the last few miles, and her self-constituted companion, a young professor of literature, staying in the same hotel, had chosen that opportunity to state his views on Ruskin as an interpreter of scenery. He had talked without stopping all the way home, and had never seen that she could hardly keep on her feet, and that his arm would have been more acceptable just then than his views. Hilary was, of course, immensely interested in Ruskin, but somehow that afternoon in Switzerland her thoughts flew to Dick. She wished he was there instead of the young professor. He would have known nothing about the modern date of our passion for mountains, but the mountains would have kept him silent, which is, after all, what they are apt to do for greater folk than either Dick or the professor. Hilary, who had begun by sitting at the feet of her new friend, told Nell that he had "chattered," and next day, as they descended to Lauterbrunnen from the Little Scheideck, she refused to marry him. So he went on to Mürren in a huff.

This episode, which in her uneventful life stood out importantly, came uppermost to-day. She remembered the forlornness with which she had stumbled along

through heavy snow, and afterward under drenching rain.

"Suppose we were on a mountain together, Dick," she said suddenly, "and we had tramped through miles of snow, and then it began to rain, and I was so tired I could hardly get on. What would you do?"

"Is that a subject?" said Dick, shying at once.

By this time they had left Dorking well behind them and were in the shade of Redlands Wood. They had hardly spoken since they left the train. Dick had repeated his question about the old woman in Leith Hill Tower, and Hilary had not replied. At that moment she was mentally plunging through snow, accompanied by the young professor.

"Answer, Dick!" she said impatiently.

He looked at her, and considered before he spoke.

"I couldn't carry you far, you know," he said. "Girls are so tall nowadays."

"O Dick! do answer seriously. It is not a frivolous question."

"It sounds like one, then. How can I tell what I should do? Give you some brandy, if I had any, I suppose. Hi! stop, Hilary! Don't tear on like that. It's one o'clock, and this is where we are going to have lunch. What have you brought?"

Dick unloaded his satchel and Hilary a string bag. They never entered an inn on these expeditions, even when Mr. Frere accompanied them, and when they were defying Mrs. Grundy it was manifestly impossible. Mrs. Grundy's views are always changing, and are never consistent, so it is perhaps hardly worth while to quote them; but it seems that while she objects to a long country walk, she simply will not stand an inn. Dear old lady! We could not do without her, and she often shows herself most sensible and prudent; but her rules are very difficult to comprehend sometimes.

Dick and Hilary did not in the least regret an inn. The pine wood was good enough for them. It had



"'I COULDN'T CARRY YOU FAR, YOU KNOW,' HE SAID."—Page 50.

rained the day before, and now the hot sun distilled fragrance from every branch and trunk of the great trees. There were shade and coolness beneath their branches, and sunlight to look at wherever the rays fell. The undergrowth of heather, bilberry, and bracken was still young, the heather tipped with delicate green, the bilberry hung with bells of dainty coral, the bracken only just unfurled ; and from where they sat, beneath an immense oak at the edge of the wood, they saw the heavenly blue of wild hyacinths growing in thousands, and sending their scent abroad with every little puff of air.

"I wish we lived in the country," said Hilary, taking off her gloves and untying the neat packages she had brought from home. "What horrid sandwiches yours look, Dick ! I am sure you cut them yourself. Have some of mine. I think papa ought to get a cottage just for Sundays and part of the summer. Don't you think it would be a good plan ? You could come on Saturdays and stay with us."

"Yes," said Dick, with hesitation.

"Where are the objections ? I can hear in your voice that some occur to you."

"Well, the additional expense for one."

"Oh !" said Hilary, lifting her eyebrows, "is that all ? Papa always has the money for anything we want."

Dick unscrewed his flask and offered Hilary some claret, but she refused it. She did not like any wine but champagne.

"I disapprove of worrying much about money," she continued. "It is not a subject that ought to fill one's thoughts at all."

"It fills them pretty full when you happen to have none," said Dick.

"But that never happens. People like ourselves have what is necessary—somehow."

"Have you ever asked how ?"

"No," said Hilary, more intent on an orange that she was carefully peeling than on Dick's surprising

gravity of tone. "I don't care about money. I never give a thought to it. Why should one?"

"That's all right for you," said Dick. "Your father works for you now, and when you're married your husband will. But a man has to earn his living—unless he inherits one, of course."

"I don't recognize your distinction," said Hilary; "you talk as if every woman had a man to work for her. Whether she ought to have is a question of opinion, but that many have not is a matter of fact."

"Unfortunately it is," said Dick.

"I should not object to earn my own living."

"How would you set about it?"

"Well! it's a secret, but I don't mind telling you, Dick."

She stopped for a moment, disturbed by the rustle of a rabbit scampering through the bracken a little way off, and then she said in an impressive undertone:

"I'm translating a Greek play into English verse, and I am going to write a pamphlet about the marriage laws."

"It's very clever of you," said Dick, "but I dare say I shall make more by a consignment of tussorees than I expect from Calcutta to-morrow."

"You have a sordid mind, Dick. I can't think why nice people should worry about pounds, shillings, and pence. Papa does, you know. It is just like children playing at cards; they are more interested in the counters than in the game. You are always heaping up your counters, and forget that life slips away hour by hour."

"But I don't see how you're to play the game without the counters," said Dick.

Hilary waved away the clouds of smoke blowing toward her from Dick's newly lighted pipe, and presently she got up and gathered a few wild hyacinths. When the pipe was finished they went on.

Meanwhile Mrs. Frere's prophecies were half fulfilled, which is perhaps as much as a nineteenth-cen-

tury prophet can expect. Herr Hansen did call. He came late in the afternoon, and excused himself by explaining that time had slipped away faster than he thought at the Zoo. He had been interviewing some of the monkeys. Mrs. Frere assured him that in her house he would find a welcome any day and any hour. Of course, he would dine. Herr Hansen said he would, with pleasure, as it was only in the bosom of an amiable and accomplished family that a poor foreigner could shake off the depressing influences of an English Sunday. Could Mrs. Frere tell him why drunkenness was the only Sabbath recreation officially encouraged in this country? Mrs. Frere shook her head, which was not used to trouble about such matters. At the present moment the question of a savory dinner seemed of greater interest, and directly an opportunity occurred she slipped out of the room to confer with the cook. She had not reckoned on an important guest to-night, and her *menu*, as she reflected on it while chatting to Herr Hansen, suddenly looked meager. But her cook was a treasure, and her store-room well supplied. If all deficiencies could be as easily made good— Luckily, Herr Hansen did not wear a dress coat. Then he had not come on purpose to propose to Hilary, and for half an hour Nell might entertain him; but Nell would have something else to do if Arthur kept his promise and arrived. Mrs. Frere hurried into the “library,” a ground-floor room, comfortably furnished with everything proper to a library excepting bookshelves and books. Here she found Mr. Frere half asleep on the sofa. He had shown a want of energy of late, a constant inclination to rest and doze, that puzzled his wife—when she thought of it. It struck her now, as she opened the door, that he looked heavy and colorless, but the impression faded from her mind at once. What she came to say possessed her.

“My dear, Herr Hansen has come. I told you he would. But he has on a frock coat. He has been to

see the monkeys at the Zoo. Can you look after him now for an hour?"

"Where are the girls?"

"O Henry! how can you ask, when you know how much I was against it? Don't say so before Herr Hansen. He is not used to your free-and-easy English ways."

"He asked Hilary to go to the opera with him," growled Mr. Frere.

"He didn't ask her to go for a walk with Dick Lorimer, though."

"Where is Nell?"

"In the drawing room, but Arthur is coming directly for tennis. His people don't allow it on Sundays, so the poor boy is driven here."

"Will they both dine? and Dick too? because I want to know which one of the three I am to entertain. I'm willing to do my duty, but I like it clearly pointed out. The other night you said I monopolized Hansen."

"An ounce of tact is worth a ton of duty in such cases, Henry. Use your wits, as I do. By the way, I think I'll stay here and watch for Hilary and Dick. I do not want them to burst into the drawing room covered with dust. You go and talk to Herr Hansen. You know you like him."

"Oh! he's all right. Not exactly romantic looking, perhaps——"

"Romantic looking?"

"From Hilary's point of view, I mean. You take her consent for granted——"

"Hilary is so *sensible*. Now, Henry, don't look at me like that when I say a word in favor of our own child. I am not calling her a beauty or a genius."

"Well, well," said Mr. Frere as he went out of the room, "you can call her what you like, but I'll eat my hat if ever you call her Frau Hansen."

Mrs. Frere sat at the window, and when Hilary and Dick arrived she attracted their attention by saying in a loud whisper :

"Come in here first."

"What is it, mamma?" said Hilary, as she entered the room. "Any bores about? How is it you are not with them?"

"Herr Hansen has come," said Mrs. Frere.

"Again! His visits are not few and far between, are they? But why are you standing sentry here?"

"Well, my dear, I thought you would probably look very dusty; and you do."

"We've had a ripping walk," said Dick, who had stopped for a moment in the hall to unstrap his satchel and mackintosh.

"I am glad you have enjoyed yourselves," said Mrs. Frere. She hesitated a little, and then said to Hilary:

"Herr Hansen does not know you have been out. Perhaps you had better dress before you go into the drawing room."

Dick rather opened his eyes at this, but he did not say anything until Hilary had taken her departure. Even then he only spoke in answer to Mrs. Frere's next remark.

"Herr Hansen has such a high opinion of Hilary," she said, "I do not wish it disturbed."

"He seems a good-natured old fellow," said Dick, with that apparent irrelevance and real point of which even rather simple-minded men are sometimes capable. Dick, of course, made his point with his second adjective.

"He is only forty," said Mrs. Frere.

"He looks more," said Dick, his eyes fixed with interest on the dusty toe of his boot.

"In Germany," continued Mrs. Frere, "young girls do not go for walks with young men. It is not considered proper."

"I have never had the least wish to live in Germany," said Dick.

"That is why I did not tell Herr Hansen that you and Hilary had gone out together."

Dick was silent.

"I wish you would not do it again," continued Mrs. Frere plaintively. "I am sure it is not the right thing, now that you are both grown up. Hilary is nearly twenty. You forget that, Dick."

"Oh, no! I don't," said Dick, getting up. "I'll just run round to my rooms and dress now. Dinner at eight, isn't it?"

"You need not dress," said Mrs. Frere. "Herr Hansen has on a frock coat."

But Dick confounded Herr Hansen and his coats, and appeared half an hour later as spick and span as he could make himself. He had taken extra pains with his white tie.

"Well, Dick! had a good walk?" said Mr. Frere, when he had helped everyone to soup. He had forgotten his wife's injunctions two minutes after they were laid on him. The masculine mind does sometimes show itself incapable of very simple performances.

"You have been walking?" said Herr Hansen. "And you?" he went on, turning to Hilary, "what have you done all day?"

"I have had a long walk," began Hilary, determined not to make a secret of an expedition that she meant to repeat as soon as possible.

"That is curious," said Herr Hansen. "Can you tell me, then, why the elephant may not walk on Sunday? Last time I went to the Zoo I rode on him. To-day, when I asked, they told me, 'On Sundays he does not go out.' Why does your sister laugh? Is it not *comme il faut* to ride on the elephant?"

So that danger passed away, and Mrs. Frere breathed comfortably again. Hilary explained in euphemism that the elephant was not a usual mount for stout elderly gentlemen. But Herr Hansen said she was mistaken. There had been people of all ages aloft when he had ventured there one Easter Monday, two years ago. He had gone because he wanted for once to mix in a British crowd, and share its pleasures.

On being questioned, however, he admitted that half an hour had given him as much of the pleasure as he could bear. He thought that tradition exaggerated the Englishman's attachment to soap and water ; nor did he see any beauty in the fashionable Volkslied 'Hi-tiddle-hi-ti-hi-ti-hi.' The words were nonsense.

"That's news," whispered Arthur Preston to Nell, and his tone made her so much inclined to laugh that she had to start a fresh subject in hot haste ; and when it was set going she scolded him in undertones for trying to make her giggle. Hilary, she knew, considered Arthur an ill-bred young man. It would never do for him to justify that opinion by visible rudeness to one of his host's guests.

CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE THE DANCE.

IT is, of course, extremely difficult to gauge the wear and tear of work that we are not used to do. Every man is apt to think his neighbor has an easy time of it. He who delves for his bread talks as if all the work of the world was done by hands. The man of business thinks in his heart that poets and painters play. The man of letters envies the artisan whose work grows hour by hour in response to the effort spent on it. A planter's life sounds like an everlasting holiday on horseback. And most of us have heard of Mr. Darwin's housekeeper, who thought her master would be all the better for "something to do."

Mr. Frere and Dick Lorimer spent the day in comfortably furnished offices, where they read and wrote letters, received visitors, and discussed questions of sale and purchase with manufacturers, customers, and subordinates. Described thus, the life does not sound a hard one. It is easy to describe anyone's doings in just such an incomplete way. Men constantly do women the wrong of supposing that a large household can run smoothly without any strain on the guiding hand. And Mrs. Frere often told her husband that, if he would manage the servants and tradespeople, she would gladly sit in front of a pedestal desk and write half a dozen letters a day. This did not prevent her from saying an hour later that the poor man was terribly overworked.

Dick Lorimer had just returned to his office one afternoon when one of his clerks ushered in Mr. Frere. He had come on business, he said ; but when

the business was ended he still lingered. The office was newly built, and very spick and span. Mr. Frere looked about him, approved of the furniture, sat down in a leather-covered easy-chair, and began talking of Dick's concerns. These were promising enough, and as long as they were the subject of conversation, even Mr. Frere looked almost cheerful. He took a generous pleasure in the young man's progress. He was eager to help where he could. He placed his own great experience and his excellent brains at Dick's service, for there was no question of rivalry between the firms. He wanted Dick to get on, to do well, to succeed in his career. The two men discussed new undertakings, made plans, were fruitful in expedients. It seemed a pity they were not at work together. Dick had more audacity than his friend, and that became his years. He did not hang back from a risk. Mr. Frere liked to tread carefully, to make a venture small in its beginnings. He warned Dick not to go ahead too fast. Solomon himself could hardly have surpassed him as an adviser. He did not say anything about his own affairs, but presently he mentioned that he must go home early. It was the night of the dance.

"Have you had lunch?" asked Dick, who noticed that Mr. Frere looked ill.

"Yes," Mr. Frere replied, with hesitation. It was very slight, but the young man heard it.

"Where do you usually go?"

"I have tried an A. B. C. shop lately."

"My stars!" said the young man. "What can you get there?"

"I have cocoa and bread and butter. I dine when I get home, you know."

"Doctor's orders?"

"No."

Dick, who was walking up and down the office, wheeled round and faced Mr. Frere.

"I am coming to a dance at your house to-night," he said.

Mr. Frere bit his lips nervously, and his anxious face clouded more deeply than before.

"I can't help it," he muttered. "They sent the invitations without consulting me. They don't understand, Dick. All they see is that Theodore has plenty of money and that I am his partner. They think I worry about trifles."

"You do make a good income, I suppose?"

"Last year I made less than I spent. This year business is bad. I tell you I'm ashamed to face Theodore. It can't go on, you know. After Christmas he can turn me out, if he likes. What is to become of them then? Who would take me on? Or suppose I die?"

"Do you talk to Mrs. Frere?"

"She won't listen. She can't bear to think of such things, she says. She trusts to my going on with Theodore, and to the girls getting married."

"Well, that's a point of view," said Dick cheerfully. "It's no use meeting misfortune halfway."

"If you don't, it probably garrotes you before you have time to cry out," said Mr. Frere.

"I suppose the girls are very likely to marry?"

Dick asked this question in an indifferent tone, as if it was quite remote from his personal interests, and Mr. Frere did not notice that he waited rather anxiously for the answer. He ceased his promenade up and down the room and stood quite still, his face turned away from his friend.

"I don't know," said Mr. Frere wearily. "Their mother thinks so, of course. But nowadays young men want to marry money."

"Not all!" said Dick.

Mr. Frere looked reflective, but he made no further remark just then, and presently he got up to go. Dick accompanied him to the door, but instead of opening it, he leaned against it, and faced Mr. Frere, with a smile that was perhaps slightly embarrassed, and yet very pleasant to see.

"Whom is Hilary going to marry?" he asked.

"No one ; so she says."

"I wish she would marry me."

"My dear boy," stammered Mr. Frere, "do you wish it?"

"Rather! Ever since she was so high." Dick's hand went down very near the floor.

"But can you afford to marry?"

"Not just yet, perhaps ; but if things go well, in a year—or even next spring, if Hilary would be content with a rabbit-hutch at first."

Mr. Frere looked quite pale. He sank on the nearest seat, and when he spoke his voice betrayed his agitation.

"To have you really one of us—to think that you were my son—I could die in peace."

"But you're not going to die," said Dick cheerfully. "We're all going to live and flourish."

Even as he spoke, the elder man turned ashen gray and tremulous.

"I can't think what has come to me," he said, in a voice as full of horror as his face. "I often feel like this now. I have lost all courage. I can't sleep, and I can't fix my mind on anything but the one idea, what will become of them when I die? There would be a thousand pounds—a year's living—and then—— For God's sake make haste, Dick! I am always doing the sum in my head, what is the least they could live on? What *must* they have for fire, and food, and shelter, and how am I to get it together?"

"Have you never insured your life?"

"For a thousand pounds, two years ago."

Dick looked grave and distressed, and before he could say anything Mr. Frere spoke again.

"I tried to increase it some time back," he said. "They refused me."

Dick did not lift his eyes. It was as if he had seen his old friend's death-warrant. But after a silence of some moments he pulled himself together and spoke more cheerfully than he really felt.

"You've worried yourself ill," he said. "You must take things easy for a bit."

"I can't. I do all the traveling, you know. I'm off to Genoa to-morrow."

"Let Theodore go instead."

"How can I refuse? I'm tied hand and foot. He has the money, and at the end of the year our partnership ceases unless he consents to renew it. If I strike work he'll tell me to go—he'd be a fool if he didn't."

"I'm afraid he's not a fool—not that kind, at least," said Dick.

Some interruption from outside reminded Mr. Frere that he was talking to a busy man. He got up.

"Wish me good luck," said Dick, as he shook hands. "I shall dance with Hilary to-night."

"My dear boy, I don't know that I ought," said Mr. Frere. "We are a falling house."

"I'm not afraid of that," said Dick. "I don't want to be in too great a hurry, though. There is such a thing as speaking at the wrong moment, I suppose, and Hilary is full of ideas just now."

"Her mother complains a good deal of that."

"Mrs. Frere has ideas too."

"Any amount," admitted her husband. In his heart he added that they were foolish, but he was too loyal to say so aloud.

"You know what her great idea is at the present moment?"

"I dare say she has mentioned it," said Mr. Frere, in an unfinished way.

"Herr Hansen."

"Oh, yes! of course. She often speaks of him; but she will forget him directly he has gone back to Hamburg."

Dick had plenty to do all the afternoon, but his business transactions did not entirely fill his thoughts. He understood that it was touch and go with his old friends, and he wondered what he had better do to help them. He could soon afford to marry and maintain a modest household—one of those little homes

that to many minds seem pleasant and comfortable, though the income spent in them counts itself by hundreds. The picture of such a home painted itself in pleasing flashes on his imagination. He felt impatient to make it ready. But would Hilary consent to share it? He did not want her to come to him solely for her father's sake; and yet he believed that, if the sisters married well, Mr. Frere would recover both his health and his courage. His expenditure might so easily be reduced when he and his wife were living by themselves, for Mrs. Frere's extravagance mainly spent itself on her children. Then Mr. Theodore would perhaps consent to renew the partnership, and so all would yet go well. It really seemed as if Mrs. Frere's point of view was not quite unreasonable. The family welfare hung on the marriages made by the girls; but what a pity that it should be so! How foolish to live in such a manner that their prosperity hung on the delicate thread of a young man's choice, of a maiden's fancy! Suppose Arthur Preston was playing fast and loose? Suppose Hilary said Nay? She railed against men and marriage. It is true that such railings are in the air to-day, and that yet most misses blossom into madams. The refusal by the insurance office was a bad piece of news. Mr. Frere had certainly looked broken down of late. Many a definite disease is less alarming than the gradual deterioration that even medical men can sometimes only describe as failure. A year's rest might set him right, or at any rate patch him up. How could he get it? Dick had not answered the question when he left the City; and while he dined and dressed for the dance his old friend's affairs still worried him.

Mrs. Frere had promised to give a small and simple entertainment: she would not ask any elderly people, or provide an elaborate supper; she would buy no flowers, and hardly any ice, and the young folks might drink cheap champagne. Mr. Frere sighed, and avoided the discussion of details; but he knew

very well that he had no cheap champagne. It was not, however, until a few hours before his guests arrived that Mr. Frere discovered what his wife's promises of economy were worth. He went home rather earlier than usual in order to get out wine and superintend the brewing of the claret cup, and even before he entered the house he saw signs of expenditure that he had never authorized. There was an awning up from the front door to the gate, and red cloth put down beneath it. A local florist seemed to have brought most of his stock in a large cart, and two men were carrying in flowering plants, palms, and ferns as quickly as they could ; while inside the house Mrs. Frere and both the girls were hard at work arranging them. They hardly heard their father's suggestion that half the plants should be sent back.

"You can't have too many flowers, papa," said Nell cheerfully. She carried a great pot of lilies in her hand, and as she put up her face to kiss her father, someone brushed against the head of the plant and knocked the blooms clean off.

"Five shillings gone there," said Nell, with regret. "Give me another pot, please."

Mr. Frere sighed and went into the dining room. At his wife's request he had carried home a heavy bag of fruit, which he set down near the sideboard. The table was laid for supper. Hilary found him gazing at it as if it was furnished for a funeral instead of for a feast.

"Hot-house flowers," he muttered, "and peaches by the dozen. I did not buy any, they were so dear. I have brought two pines. I wish I had been content with gooseberries. I might have known that if I spent a guinea your mother would spend two. And now I must get out champagne for eighty people. Oh !" he cried, in one of those sudden gusts of anger that of late had sometimes shaken him, "go on as you like—spend more than I make, and all I can borrow—sell house and home, and then beg for bread in the streets."

Hilary glanced at the bag of fruit she had just picked up from the floor. Nothing in the room, her father's purchases least of all, suggested straitened means. His words hardly carried meaning; they inspired no dread. Ever since she could remember he had talked in the same way, and nothing had ever come of it. He had constantly complained of his expenses, looked forward to death and misfortune, and in his gloomy moods cast a shadow on the very pleasures he supplied with a liberal hand. Hilary supposed this habit of his must be a common one among men, and her acquaintance with it helped to strengthen her objection to marry. It would be very unpleasant to depend for money on the good or bad humors of some commonplace young man—a creature who would probably be her inferior mentally, and without any doubt morally. For her father she felt very sorry, because she saw that he was really vexed and anxious. She knew how generous he was, how unexacting, how ready to spend every penny he made on his wife and children. At the same time she could not refrain from the reflection that men often show themselves incapable of exercising the authority placed by custom in their hands. The reflection, as it flashed through her mind, consoled her. Perhaps for want of use they would gradually lose it, as other bad habits can be lost.

"Why did you consent to give the dance?" she said.

"Oh!" said Mr. Frere irritably, "you all do as you like."

That was very true, and Hilary knew it. It was not in her own home that her belief in the wrongs of women and the tyranny of men had been awakened. Indeed her only real and intimate experience of domestic life might have suggested to her that the theoretical subjection of women is not always borne out in practice; but at this period Hilary's judgments were gloriously independent of mere fact. She took her gods at second-hand, and stared at them until her

eyes were dazzled; then you might stand in her path and she would not see.

"It is not for myself I care," continued Mr. Frere; "I shall be dead. But what is to become of you?"

His wife came in just then and overheard his melancholy speech. She asked Hilary to go and help Nell with the flowers, and directly the girl had left the room Mrs. Frere said to her husband: "How can you make the child miserable to-night, when it is so important that she should look her best? I tell you they will both be married by Christmas."

"So you always say; but suppose you are wrong, and that I die first? What then?"

"Henry," said Mrs. Frere, "I have had a tiring day, and I have a long evening before me, and Mrs. Theodore is coming. Don't upset me. You know how wicked I think such speeches are. I would rather starve with my children than grudge them everything while they are young. God takes care of the sparrows, and he will take care of us. He won't let you die while we want you so badly—besides, there is always the workhouse. Now, get out plenty of champagne, and drink a glass yourself. I am sure that is all you want."

Mr. Frere did not look as if he thought his wife's arguments convincing, but he moved away toward the cellar, and it was curious to hear her call after him: "Don't be extravagant, Henry. The second-best champagne will do, and we need not have hock as well," and to hear him reply: "I can't give Theodore and Hansen bad wine, my dear. Theodore drinks nothing but champagne, and Hansen likes my Steinberger Cabinet."

"Arthur says papa is so different from most oldish men," said Nell, overhearing this. "They generally think any rubbish good enough for young people."

"Young men soon find that out," remarked Mrs. Frere sententiously.

"Yes," said Hilary, "that is the kind of thing they take a real interest in."

"Arthur does not care about wine," said Nell quickly.

"He will when he is old enough. I dare say he prefers ginger beer now."

"You talk as if he was a boy, Hilary."

"So he is—a mere boy."

"Well, if it comes to that—I am a mere girl," said Nell dreamily. Mrs. Frere had left the room again. The sisters were still busy with the flowers: Hilary on her knees in front of the fireplace, and Nell just behind, a pot of yellow daisies in her hand.

"Dear me, Nell!" said Hilary, half turning round, "are you engaged to him?"

"Of course not," said Nell, with a deep blush.

"But you may be any day. How dreadful!"

"Dreadful! Delightful, you mean."

"A boy and girl like you! You would hate each other in six months."

"Father and mother don't hate each other."

"No," said Hilary, with reflective eyes; "but perhaps they are an exception to the rule."

"Suppose anyone asks you to marry him?"

"No one would," said Hilary, drawing herself up behind the daisies that she had just taken from Nell's hands. "Men do not propose without some encouragement, and I give none."

"I should have thought they might, if they were very keen, you know."

"In these days," said Hilary, "young men are never very keen, unless there is money in it."

"Arthur does not care for money."

"Has he told you so?"

"No, but he knows I have none."

Hilary, who had filled the fireplace to her satisfaction, got up now and stared into the glass over the mantelpiece. She saw her sister's face there as well as her own. The younger girl's expression was dreamy, smiling, and serene.

"Some men are flirts," said Hilary.

Directly the words had escaped her lips she would

gladly have recalled them. Their effect on her sister was cruel. Nell turned quite pale, and with a gesture of impatience and indignation moved away.

"Dear Nell," cried her sister, with compunction, "I hope Arthur is not one, since you care so much."

"Do you believe that he is?" asked Nell steadily.

Much against her will, Hilary hesitated before she spoke, and when she did speak stammered.

"I don't know," she said. "Sophia and he—mother thinks—why doesn't he either keep away or speak? If he does not—men who dangle after girls are most dishonorable."

"Well," said Nell, "what is a man to do? How can he get to know a girl if he doesn't dangle, as you call it. Would you have him propose to her at the end of an hour's acquaintance?"

"My dears," said Mrs. Frere, suddenly appearing in a great bustle, "three bouquets have come from Herr Hansen—such beauties!—but they are all three the same size."

"Did you want yours to be bigger than ours?" said Nell, hanging behind a little, while Hilary hurried into the hall to look at these unexpected tributes from their foreign friend.

"No, no, dear; of course not," whispered Mrs. Frere. "But I *did* think the one he sent Hilary might have been larger than ours, you know—just to show what he meant. Flowers are rather serious, and of course he will have on evening clothes to-night. I really don't see what is to prevent him——"



THE FRERES WERE VERY POPULAR PEOPLE."—Page 60.



CHAPTER VII.

A FOOLISH VIRGIN.

HILARY had taken an unexpected fancy to Herr Hansen. She forgave him for eating with his knife because, she said, he played the 'Feuerzauber' as if he was a whole orchestra, and Beethoven's Opus 109 almost as well as Hans von Bülow. She knew which of the three nosegays he meant for her. He had asked her which color her gown would be, and she had told him yellow. Two of the nosegays were of roses, and one of yellow Iceland poppies, so she took that one for herself. He saw it in her hands directly he entered the room, although she was dancing, and some way from the door. He did not dance, but he liked to watch Hilary. She looked charming in her transparent lemon-colored draperies. She wore no ornaments on her neck and arms, and no fringe on her forehead; she knew that bangs and bangles did not become her. Her hair grew naturally as it best suited her face, and luckily the fashion of the day permitted her to leave bracelets and necklaces upstairs. When she caught sight of Herr Hansen she nodded and smiled at him, and he understood that she was saying, "Thank you."

The Freres were very popular people. Everyone liked going to their house, whether to dance or to dine. They did not gather great crowds together, nor did they trot after little lions; they might have done both, but, of course, they were not very worldly wise. They asked the friends they really liked, and Mrs. Frere was the only person in the house whose tastes were governed by sordid ambition. She was a shockingly worldly woman, Mrs. Theodore said, and she

certainly did wish Hilary and Nell to marry well. However, even as a Mammon worshiper, her kindness did not depart from her. She preferred the moneyed men, but she was hospitable to the poor ones, perhaps as a set-off to her inward hopes that they would not aspire to her daughters. Since Herr Hansen had come forward so much she reckoned Dick as poor.

It is curious how some houses are overrun by young men, while others seem under a ban that drives them away. Hilary and Nell were not more beautiful than many other girls, nor were their abilities at all remarkable. Gold had they none; yet every season seemed to bring them lovers. Like other gifts of fortune, suitors are certainly distributed in an unfair, mysterious way. Some women have a choice among numbers, while others, apparently as fair to see, are wooed by never a one. No man living can tell you the reason why. They will give you vague generalities about grace and charm; if they know German, they will probably mention the *ewig-weibliche*; if they like slang, they will answer you in the current phrases. You go home still wondering why Chloe has had twenty offers, and her cousin Doris none.

It was a great satisfaction to Mrs. Frere to perceive that none of the pretty girls who came to her dance eclipsed her own two darlings. Mrs. Theodore, it is true, wore a conquering air, but then she, being married, did not count. Besides, her victory might have been won without her personal assistance. If she had sent her clothes and jewels on a wax figure she would have created the same sensation. She always entered a room with a little smile, that was as much as to say, "Yes, I know I am too well dressed, too gorgeous, too expensive for my company. It isn't my fault, though. It is yours for being poor and shabby. I really haven't got anything cheaper." And in a sense her smile expressed the truth. Her garments were irreproachable in color, cut, and texture, but always rather over-fine. To-night she wore a white brocade, stiff with silver embroidery. It was cut perilously

low, but her neck and arms were almost covered by diamonds. Sophia looked as plain as usual, in pale pink.

"Shall I find you a partner, Mrs. Theodore?" said Mrs. Frere. "Do you mean to dance?"

"There doesn't seem to be much room," she replied, and her objection was not unreasonable. From where she stood at the door the crowd looked uncomfortably dense already.

"Of course, with your train you almost need an empty space," said Mrs. Frere.

"Or a clever partner. How badly young men dance nowadays!"

"Did they dance better when you were a girl?"

"I did not know any of these young men when I was a girl," said Mrs. Theodore. "I don't suppose I ever shook hands with a business man until I met my husband."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Frere, and without prolonging her reply she drifted further into the room among the dancers. The waltz they were watching had come to an end, and the hostess wished to provide partners for two or three girls who were usually wall-flowers, in particular for Sophia Theodore. It was not an easy task, and she looked about for a daughter to assist her, but they had both disappeared.

"Where can they be?" she asked of Dick.

"Nell is just coming back from the refreshment room now. There she is. I saw Hilary on Herr Hansen's arm a moment ago. Shall I find her for you, Mrs. Frere?"

"No, thank you, Nell will do; and what dances have you left, Dick? I want partners for Sophia Theodore."

"I haven't one, I'm afraid. How about Hansen? He came late."

"Herr Hansen does not dance."

"Well, he's wise, with his figure," said Dick.

The musicians tuned up for the Barn Dance, and Dick had to claim his partner. He looked out anx-

iously for Hilary, but she did not appear. Herr Hansen, too, was absent. The stupid dance seemed to go on forever, and, meanwhile, the poppy-giver took his innings. Dick wished he had sent Hilary some flowers. Whose would she have carried? his, or those offered by that stout, middle-aged German? Hilary's name stood on his card for the supper dance and for two later ones. They were his own choice. The early hours of the evening are not those in which a man finds it easy to have his say. Wine, dance, and song set the pulses astir, fire the blood, give eloquence and courage. These good things Dick felt that he would need. He was by no means sure of Hilary. He was not even sure that she would dismiss the poppy-giver.

Meanwhile, Herr Hansen had led his lady to the veranda outside the drawing-room, and there they sat together, undisturbed and unseen. The moon shone over the great elms at the bottom of the garden; the dance music came through the open windows; so did a confused buzz of voices and of prancing footsteps.

"It is a pity that you should miss this dance," said Herr Hansen. "To me you can talk any day, but all young girls love to dance."

"I like sitting out here," said Hilary. "It is not like London, is it? to see nothing but the moon and those great trees."

"Ah! you should see Hamburg," said Herr Hansen. "That *is* a town."

Hilary smiled vaguely, and held up her nosegay to look at it. The flowers nodded at her, and the long trails quivered in the moonlight.

"They do not understand bouquets here," said Herr Hansen. "When I saw how carelessly they had made yours I felt very angry. In Hamburg they are as even as if they were molded out of vegetables or wax, in rings of different colors and quite flat; or they make a harp of flowers, or a ship. Last year my friend Frau Werner sent me, on my birthday, a

little piano made of Parmese violets. Imagine that ! ”

“ Was it pretty ? ” said Hilary.

“ It was most artistic,” said Herr Hansen.

Hilary shut her eyes and listened to the swing of the dance music. It was very pleasant out here with her comfortable middle-aged friend.

“ How old are you, Miss Hilary ? ” he said. He never called her Miss Frere, and she supposed, quite rightly, that he was not acquainted with the English custom.

“ I am not quite twenty,” she said.

“ It is very young. I am forty-five.”

“ Really ! ” She nearly betrayed her surprise that he was not older, but she remembered just in time that he might not like it.

“ Yes,” he said, sighing. “ I have never married.”

“ Well,” said Hilary, “ you haven’t missed much, have you ? ”

“ That is a strange thing for a young girl to say. It is not what I expected.”

“ What ought I to have said ? ”

“ Well, perhaps, that it is not too late.”

“ I should not think it is,” said Hilary considerately. “ You might be more comfortable. You say your housekeeper has neglected you lately.”

“ In Germany we think Englishwomen are very bad housekeepers. They are not at all domestic, we believe.”

“ Perhaps you are right,” said Hilary cheerfully. “ I’m sure I’m not.”

“ Ah ! do not say so, Miss Hilary. If you married, it would come.”

“ Would it ? ” said Hilary, in the voice of one listening to an evil prophet. “ I am afraid you think nothing good can come out of England,” she added gayly.

“ I cannot say so,” answered Herr Hansen impartially. “ Your pickles are excellent.”

“ Well, that’s something, you know,” said Hilary, getting up ; but Herr Hansen detained her.

"Please do not go yet," he said. "I have a question to ask you."

"About Bayreuth?" inquired Hilary, sitting down again.

"No! no! About myself. You do not really think I am too old to marry?"

For the first time the girl's heart sank with an uncomfortable presentiment of what was coming. She half rose, and then after all sat still. She would not be fatuous enough to flee from a difficulty that might not be near. Herr Hansen's voice and his hesitating manner were suspicious, but his figure reassured her.

"You must find someone near your own age," she said.

"It is only our bodies that grow old. Our hearts remain young."

"Do they?" said Hilary.

"You who are so learned—so emancipated—you would not care for looks in your husband. What are looks? They vanish."

"I don't care for a husband at all," said Miss Frere. "I do not wish to marry."

"That is young girl's talk. Every woman should marry and have her own home, where she is the queen. A lonely life is nothing. I have tried it and can tell you. At first you think it is fine; you are free; you can cut a dash; you spend your money as you like; you knock about the world. Then one day you wake up and are old. Soon your life ends. There is no one to care whether you live or die; and you begin to think of a home where there are two—one to enjoy things with you, to be happy when you are happy, and sad when you are sad. Her eyes near yours to see what is beautiful, her ears to listen with you; and perhaps some little children to make you young again. I have two houses, Miss Hilary, and much money, and Hamburg is a fine town—much finer than London. It is like Venice, only the houses are white and clean. Would you like to live there?"

Hilary shook her head. She hated to hurt her friend. He blinked at her through his spectacles, and she met his mild, kindly smile.

"Think over it," he urged. "You need not make up your mind to-night. To-morrow is also a day. I know that I am not exactly a *Romeo*, but I can offer my wife a beautiful existence; and I am a good fellow."

"I am sure you are," said Hilary. She listened rather anxiously for the music to stop. She knew that when it did some of the dancers would come out here for air. "I really do not mean to marry," she added. "I should hate housekeeping and all that."

"We will take a good cook," said Herr Hansen. "Do come, Miss Hilary."

"No," said Hilary. "I cannot."

"I am very unhappy," said Herr Hansen. "I wish I was not so old. It is true that I am too old for a young girl."

"I don't know about that," said Hilary; "but if you were twenty years younger I should still say No; and if *Romeo* himself came, I should bid him begone from my balcony."

"My child," said Herr Hansen, in a fatherly way, "when happiness comes, do not throw it away. It may only come once."

He got up when he had spoken and walked a few steps toward the open window, where he was met by a lively group of young people, who had finished their dance, and were streaming out of the hot room. Hilary remained hidden and silent for a little. When one of the moon-gazing couples discovered her, she got up hurriedly and returned to her neglected duties.

"I *wish* you would find some partners for Sophia Theodore," said Mrs. Frere, directly she came across her daughter. "People say that modern young men are mercenary, but no one would think so to see the fuss they make about dancing with thirty thousand pounds."

Hilary did what she could ; but before she had canvassed many young men, Dick claimed her for the supper dance. It was a waltz, and in spite of the heat they both enjoyed it. Then, while the first batch went into the dining room, those left behind had an "extra." Hilary and Dick sat out on the veranda while that proceeded. They went in to supper rather late, got a little table to themselves, and enjoyed their chicken and champagne ; but Hilary's mood did not seem to Dick propitious. Once she hardly heard what he said ; once he saw her take up the poppies and glance at them with wistful eyes. He felt inclined to throw them from her.

"What has become of Herr Hansen?" he asked.
"I don't know."

"You were sitting on the veranda with him a little while ago."

"Yes, but I've not seen him since."

Dick felt encouraged, and proposed that when they had finished supper they should go and sit on the veranda.

"Because you want to smoke?" said Hilary.

"Did Herr Hansen smoke?" inquired Dick.

"No ; but you are not bound to imitate him in every respect, are you?"

Hilary stumbled over the end of her query and turned suspiciously red. Dick looked at her keenly.

"I may be glad to do so," he said, getting up.
"How did he entertain you?"

For the moment Hilary could walk on a little ahead and make no reply. They had to pass through the drawing room, crowded now with dancers ; the wall flowers as well as the beauties were on their feet. Even the lazy young men had become more alert, and the doorways were less thickly decorated than before. Outside, on the veranda, two or three couples were staring, so Dick and Hilary descended to the garden. Here they met Arthur and Nell discussing the advantages of croquet by moonlight. The argument seemed to be one of many points and to require con-

centration ; at any rate, the debaters wandered away together and disappeared among the elms.

"I think I ought to go back to the house," said Hilary, standing still. "Mother might want me."

"Come once round," said Dick, in a wheedling voice. "It's our dance, you know."

"Light your cigar, then. I know what slaves men are to their silly little habits."

As Hilary spoke a large moth flew wildly against her face, and with a sudden startled movement she stumbled against Dick. If he had not been stalwart they would both have fallen, but he was quick, and helped her to regain her footing. As he did so, he drew her arm through his.

"Do you think I need support?" said Hilary, half vexed, half amused.

"There might be another moth about," said Dick.

"If you think I am afraid of moths or mice, or even beetles,—yes, even beetles,—you are mistaken. I am not so silly. That moth did not frighten me, it surprised me. Perhaps, as you are a man, you do not see the difference."

"Has not a man eyes?"

"Don't gibe, Dick. I'm serious. Come, and sit down in the summer house. I've twisted my foot a little. No. You needn't tear off for doctors and rouse the household. It's nothing. I shall be able to dance in five minutes."

But in five minutes neither of them had moved from the little summer house, which was moonlit and sheltered. Carnations and lilies, growing just outside, sent in their fragrance ; jessamine hung unpruned about the entry ; the night wind fanned through the elm branches, and the murmur of it mingled with the dance music that came faintly and brokenly across the garden.

"It's getting too hot in London," said Hilary. "I shall be glad to go away. This morning in Regent Street I could hardly breathe."

"Are you going away?"

"Oh! I suppose so. We always go away for the autumn months."

"But have you made your plans? Will your father get three months' rest? He needs it."

"He won't get it. He has often been telegraphed for after a few days. It vexes my mother when it happens."

"Isn't it rather lonely for him when you are away?"

"I never thought of that," said Hilary. "Perhaps it is; but he never makes any objection on that score. He only complains of the expense."

"Well, it is his business to think of that," said Dick.

"I wish I had plenty of money," said Hilary.

"Oh! do you? I shouldn't have thought you'd care about it."

"I'm very mercenary. All my life I've seen the disadvantage of being short of money. I want a lot."

"You wouldn't marry a poor man, then?"

"Oh, well! I could share my money with him, you know, if I had it."

"Yes," said Dick, "but I mean if you hadn't got it—as things are, in fact."

"Oh! as things are, in fact," said Hilary mockingly, "I don't mean to marry at all."

"Why not?"

"I would rather die than spend my life with a creature I considered my inferior in every mental and moral capacity."

Dick looked puzzled. After a little hesitation he said: "A decent man never does think in that way of the girl he wants for his wife."

"You are dense, Dick," cried Hilary, with wide-open, smiling eyes. "It is I who think that way about men."

"I didn't know we were such a bad lot."

"You have been ruined by centuries of despotic power on the one hand, and slavish submission on the other."

"You speak like a book."

"It's none the less true."

"I don't see much to choose between men and women, myself," said Dick rather hotly. "On the whole, perhaps, men are better. They gossip less; they quarrel less; they are less false and vain."

"They quarrel more; they cheat more; they are more selfish."

"And yet we cannot do without each other, can we?"

"I am going to try," said Hilary, with decision. She got up as she spoke, and seemed to expect that Dick would follow her. But he leaned back in the darkness, and spoke with some trace of agitation. On her face, as she stood near the entry, the moonlight fell. He could see her starry eyes; he could make out the determined, half angry set of her mouth.

"Hilary," he said, "you were such a dear little girl five or six years ago."

"I am not a little girl now."

"I know. All the while I was away I used to picture you growing up. I thought—I hoped——"

His voice grew uncertain, and he stopped a moment. Hilary took a step away from him, as if she would elude what he had yet to say: but he sprang to his feet, and in a moment got ahead of her.

"I want you for my wife," he said, with a determination that was really passionate, but which she resented as unauthorized. "In a sense what you say is true. No man worth his salt thinks himself good enough for the girl he loves. Don't you see how it is? I will kiss your feet if you will let me, and yet my arm is stronger than yours, my back is broader, I want to hedge you in."

"You are very kind, Dick. You always were; but that is just the conventional attitude, you know."

"I don't care what names you call it. It's the natural, sensible one. Will you marry me, Hilary?"

"No, I will not."

Whether he took this prompt denial to heart much, Hilary could not tell. Just then he said nothing

more, and as they walked back to the house together his head was turned away from her.

"Are you vexed, Dick?" she said, after a time.

"I have more to say, and I hardly know how to say it. Come and sit down again, and let us talk things out. I've got to make you change your mind before we part."

They had come to an iron seat at one end of the lawn, and Hilary sat down on it.

"You won't do that," she said.

"Listen, then. I saw your father this afternoon. I asked his consent."

"How proper of you!"

"He gave it—willingly."

"I dare say. Father was always fond of you; for that matter, so am I."

"Don't you care to please your father?"

"Certainly. But I must please myself first. You see that, I suppose?"

"No. I can't say that I do."

"We don't agree about anything."

"It seems not."

"Perhaps you like the idea of a cat and dog life."

"I like the idea of a life with you."

"O Dick!" exclaimed Hilary, in a mock woeful voice, "that I should live to hear you make pretty speeches."

"I don't find it easy, I confess," he said grimly.

"It is your own fault. You ought to understand."

"What?"

"That women have grown and changed. We no longer find our only happiness in marriage. I want my life to be a wide one."

"What do you mean? Will you teach in a school, or write for the magazines, or rant at hole-and-corner meetings? You talk nonsense."

"You are narrow."

Dick wished he might swear—chiefly at himself. He had been so determined to keep his temper, to see that Hilary kept hers. And now, instead of melting

under the ardor of his arguments, she was up in arms against him, indignant, *cap-à-pie*.

"If you expect to marry a man without faults, of course you will be disappointed," he said rather irrelevantly. "But why should you? You are not faultless yourself, I suppose?"

"I should expect my husband to think me so," said Hilary, with a provoking smile.

"Then you had better marry a fool," said Dick, out of patience. "I dare say you will."

"Well, no, Dick," said Hilary, her eyes dancing with mischief. "I have explained that I will not."

So, for the moment, Hilary had the best of it. Dick said nothing more, and as soon as he could he went home. As he was putting on his coat he saw Mr. Frere, and he could not resist the appeal for news that spoke in his host's face.

"It's no good," he said, under his breath.

"What, my boy?" said Mr. Frere anxiously.

"Hilary has refused me."

"You don't mean that she prefers Hansen?"

"I don't know. She tells me she won't marry at all."

"But don't girls always say that?"

The two men had gone just outside the front door, where they could speak unheard. Dick saw that Mr. Frere looked worried and haggard. He was biting his lips nervously, and his fingers trembled as they touched his whiskers.

"Hilary meant what she said."

"I must talk to her," said Mr. Frere. "She is a very good girl; she will listen to reason."

"I would rather she listened to me," said Dick.

"Did you tell her how much I wished it?"

"I said something of the kind."

The two men were silent, and after a moment's pause Dick moved away.

"Good-night," he said.

Mr. Frere followed him.

"Did you leave a stone unturned?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't know," said Dick ; "I'm not good at talking."

He stopped again, and evidently had something more to say, something he found it difficult to express.

"I told Hilary she ought to think of you," he began. "At the same time——"

Mr. Frere did not help him out. He listened, but his eyes showed that he was brooding over the news.

"A man wants to be married for his own sake," finished Dick, with an effort.

"Of course, of course !" assented Mr. Frere.

"Perhaps it would be best to say nothing to Hilary."

"Do you think so ?"

"Even if you persuaded her to say Yes, it would not be much satisfaction to me, unless she changed a good deal."

"I see," said Mr. Frere. And the two men parted, after shaking hands.

Mr. Frere found, when he got back into the house, that his guests were beginning to go. For the next half hour he was busy speeding them. It struck two as the last carriage drove away and he shut the garden gate. He yawned with weariness, and hurried into the dining room, where he had seen his wife and daughters a little while ago ; but the girls had gone to bed. His wife was waiting there by herself, and he saw in her face and manner traces of extreme agitation. In fact, her eyes were full of tears, and her voice broke as she tried to speak to him.

"Henry," she said, "the child has refused Herr Hansen."

Mr. Frere dropped into a chair, and looked fixedly at the floor. His brow was contracted in anxious wrinkles ; his eyelids concealed his eyes ; he bit his lips nervously.

"I have always told you not to build too much on the girls marrying well," he said.

"Oh !" cried his wife, "now you think you are in the right when you croak like a raven. I always told

you our girls would have offers. If Hilary dismisses a millionaire, it does not affect my argument."

"It affects mine, though. It makes it true."

"I know she will marry Dick Lorimer; such a poor match, in comparison."

"You may make yourself easy on that score," said Mr. Frere; "she has refused Dick, too, to-night."

His wife stared at him, first in bewilderment, then in distress, and then with a broad, bland, satisfied smile.

"Two men in one evening! Now, who is right, Henry? You or I?"

She pulled a dish of little cakes toward her, and poured out two glasses of champagne.

"We must plan our summer journey next," she said. "I have a fancy for Norderney. We could take Hamburg by the way."

"Norderney! Hamburg! the very night of this dance!" cried Mr. Frere. "I tell you I cannot afford it. We must not travel this year."

"We all need a change," said his wife placidly. "Nell looks very pale. You would not like her to be ill. Her ticket will not come to more than a doctor's bill, and we are obliged to live—either here or there."

"Then go to Worthing or Aldborough for a fortnight."

"No," said Mrs. Frere, with the obstinacy that often teaches a weak nature to act with disastrous effect. "I like the idea of Norderney. I do not feel well, either. I want a change from housekeeping worries. I cannot stand the discomforts of English seaside lodgings. Besides, you need a cheerful holiday."

"What I need is peace of mind," said Mr. Frere. "I want to sleep at night, and not lie awake thinking that you are beggars, and that I am a scoundrel—yes, a scoundrel. There is no other name for a man who has a wife and children and yet spends every penny he earns—a coward, a scoundrel, a heartless fool—and yet, my God! how can I help it? What can I do?"

He had half risen, and then, after all, had sunk down again, his face ashen gray, his lips twitching with excitement.

"You do upset yourself so dreadfully, and me, too," said Mrs. Frere, looking very uncomfortable. "I am sure you give us all we want."

"If I die to-night, you may be in the streets."

"I wish you would not speak of such awful things. It is so wicked to look forward to the worst. There are troubles enough in the world without creating imaginary ones. If you had not let Hilary go to college she would never have refused Herr Hansen. Now, that is a real misfortune."

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK'S FOLLY.

A DAY or two after the dance Dick suddenly made up his mind to go to Hamburg on business. He carried introductions from Mr. Frere and from Herr Hansen with him, and as he also had friends of his own there, his visit promised to be sociable as well as lucrative. He knew the city, and liked it ; but on this occasion he did not find himself amused. The business hours were satisfactory enough. His work occupied his mind, tired his body, and brought him pleasant signs of success. It was play-time that hung rather heavily on his hands. He felt out of spirits, and anxious about his best friends. He wondered what they were doing, and whether Hilary would marry Herr Hansen. In Hamburg he heard Herr Hansen spoken of with much respect. Dick got tired of his name. He heard it too often, because he saw a good deal of some people called Werner, who were evidently very intimate with Hilary's stout admirer, and quite unsuspicious that he could cast eyes at an English girl.

Herr Werner was a flourishing man of business ; his wife had been at school with Mrs. Frere, and still corresponded with her in terms of adjectival affection. They had a large family, most of whom were already married and out in the world. Two daughters remained at home. One was still a schoolgirl ; the other, Olga, had passed her eighteenth birthday and required establishment. Frau Werner encouraged the girl to set her heart on Herr Hansen ; and the girl had been quite docile until Dick appeared, when it was plain to her mother that she would readily have

given her heart to him. The quiet, keen-eyed Englishman became Olga Werner's hero. She dreamed of him, watched for him, wept for him when he sailed away.

The Werners would probably have given him their daughter, if he had asked for her. Modest as his present fortunes were, business men believed in his future. He was known to be honest, able, and hard-working. Dick missed a considerable step to worldly success when he stared so absently at Olga Werner's blue eyes. She would have come to her husband with a dowry; and an alliance with her would have meant an alliance with some great mercantile houses, as useful to a young trader as the protection of a great political power may be to a little new one. Frau Werner quite thought the match might still take place. She did not feel desperately anxious for it; she had other strings to her bow, and, on the whole, she preferred a son-in-law of her own nation; if possible, of her own town. But she liked Dick very well, and she expected that he would eventually come forward. A woman who has married two daughters knows that young men do not always conduct a courtship with the hot, unbroken ardor of romance.

Meanwhile Dick returned to London without a suspicion. The Werners were part of Hamburg. Next time business took him there he would see them again as he would see the Jungfernstieg and sail on the Alster—in the natural course of things. In London he had other pleasures, and older, closer friends. The first person he wished to see was Mr. Frere. He asked himself whether he could go to the house as usual, though Hilary had rejected him, and he decided that he would. He called there one evening, two or three days after his return, and found Mr. Frere sitting by himself on the veranda. Dick got a fright when he saw him, he looked so ill.

"All alone?" said Dick, looking round.

"Yes," said Mr. Frere. "My wife and the girls are at the theater. Arthur Preston is with them."

Dick sat down and pulled out his pipe. Mr. Frere was smoking too. An evening paper lay on the table.

"All well?" said Dick.

"My wife wants to go to Norderney," replied Mr. Frere. "She says Nell looks pale."

"What *are* you going to do?"

"God knows!"

Mr. Frere spoke as if Dick's question referred to their general prospects, and not merely to a summer holiday.

"Why don't you have a talk to Theodore and get something settled?" said Dick.

"Because I haven't a leg to stand on."

"I can't believe it. Your knowledge, your experience, your personal acquaintance with both buyers and sellers must be of value. Theodore doesn't care about work nowadays. He wants to go into Parliament and toady the smart people. I should think he needs you as much as you need him."

Mr. Frere shook his head, but he said nothing. He seemed to be too much out of spirits to discuss his prospects, and too listless to talk of anything else. Dick took up the evening paper; his eye had been caught by a big headline about the panic on the Stock Exchange.

"That bubble has burst," he said, alluding to the crash of the great firm that had chiefly caused the panic. It was unnecessary to mention the bubble more definitely; the whole City had roared its name for a week. He looked up, expecting Mr. Frere to make some remark, to join him in righteous denunciation, but the older man only sighed.

"I know a young fool who got in at the top. He is cleared out. I am very sorry for him," said Dick.

"Is he married?"

"No."

"Then what does it matter? If I was alone in the world to-night, I could hold my head up. But how I am to tell my wife and children, Heaven knows."

"Tell them what?" asked Dick, with an uncomfortable sensation of fear.

"I'm cleared out and worse," said Mr. Frere, in a shaky, feeble voice. "Arthur Preston put me on to Fagin's Trust Shares a month ago. There's a call."

"How many shares have you got?"

"Four hundred; and the call is five pounds."

"Two thousand pounds!" said Dick blankly.

"I've just been all over the house, estimating the furniture; but it is old-fashioned. I suppose we must sell it and turn out. I don't know what else we can do. I haven't told my wife yet. But whatever we do, if we sell our beds and our spoons, I can't raise two thousand pounds before the call is due, unless Theodore helps me, and he is the last man in the world I want to ask."

"I suppose if you drew two thousand pounds out of the business, you would have nothing much left for your private expenses till Christmas."

"Not a farthing. I have been making about three thousand a year, and spending more."

Dick was silent for a long time, turning over ways and means.

"If you could begin to spend less——"

"That's what I mean to do, if only Theodore consents to renew the partnership," interrupted Mr. Frere. "Sometimes I hope he will—I go up and down—the suspense is awful. Of course, I have the whole business at my fingers' ends. I should let this house, and go into a much smaller one."

"Yes. But how are you going to get this two thousand pounds?" asked Dick. Ever since he had heard of the new liability, he had been trying to harden his heart against his old friend; but he did not succeed. When Mr. Frere spoke eagerly, Hilary's likeness to him became apparent. Just now, Dick had seen his face brighten suddenly as hers did sometimes. The father had looked at him as the daughter did, with guileless, consulting eyes.

His question brought the shadows back again, and he felt as if he had spoken with brutal bluntness; nevertheless, he stuck to his point.

"You must get it, you know," he said.

"I suppose I can raise it somehow by a bill of sale on the furniture and my profits for the second half of this year."

"But what will you all live on—here?"

"We shall not be here if the house is let and the furniture sold," said Mr. Frere. "I suppose we must go into lodgings. The girls had better look for situations. Then we shall be ready for next year, when Theodore kicks me out. I suppose I can get a clerkship. You will be going ahead soon, Dick; you must find a corner for me."

Dick felt too much perplexed and troubled to smile. He stared at the elms in the garden, and wondered what he could do to help his old friend. He could not afford to lose two thousand pounds, and yet he was slowly making up his mind to run the risk.

"You must not sell your furniture and go into lodgings," he said finally. "That would be wretched."

"I must do something of the kind," said Mr. Frere.

"You can get the money if—suppose I back a bill?"

Mr. Frere looked at Dick with a swift, vanishing expression of relief. It lit up his face for a moment, and then faded again, leaving it as hunted and weary as before.

"My dear boy," he said, "it isn't as if I could meet the bill. How should I pay you back?"

"If you live at a lower rate, you can pay it back gradually."

"But how soon?"

"You will go on with Theodore next year," said Dick, nodding his head confidently. "He is too sharp a chap to let you go. He may offer you a fixed share, I suppose—oh! I'm not afraid."

"My dear Dick," said Mr. Frere huskily. The young man's belief in him, his cheerful expectations, were as helpful as the actual offer of money. "But it's unfair to you," he resumed. He knew that Dick's resources were slender, and the business demands on them great.

"I shan't be spending much myself," said Dick evasively.

"I wonder whether I can make my wife understand."

"Is it necessary?"

"Perhaps not."

Dick had no desire that Hilary should hear of the transaction; and Mr. Frere knew exactly what his wife would say if he told her about it. She would listen inattentively, assure him that business matters were not her province, and observe that her husband never mentioned them at home unless they happened to be disagreeable. The tradesmen had to be paid whether the City was in a good humor or a bad one, and no man could expect his wife to feed the household on nothing, just because some stupid shares went down. If they went down, they would also go up, she supposed. She could not understand why her husband should worry over such an everyday affair. She could not easily reduce their expenses, because at all times she practiced thrift, for the pleasure of it, and because it was her nature. They might give up the *Times* and take the *Standard* instead if Mr. Frere pleased; and give sixpence instead of a shilling to the German band.

Mr. Frere had turned dreamily silent while he carried on this imaginary conversation. It was not altogether imaginary. The two suggestions for retrenchment had actually been made by Mrs. Frere last time they talked of money. She could not understand why her husband had not accepted them with greater gratitude; and she had said that her own economical bent must be a very strong one, otherwise it would long ago have been discouraged by Mr.

Frere's indifference. Eighteenpence a week saved was three pounds eighteen a year. It would buy Nell gloves.

Dick stayed until the ladies returned from the theater. They came out on the veranda and talked about the play. Hilary wore her green gown, and a long pale green cloak with silver clasps. The play had amused her, and she laughed a good deal as she told her father the story. Now and then she turned to Dick with an explanation, an invitation to laugh with her at the joke. He had never seen her in better spirits, and his own rose at the thought of what he had done. His wish had been to make a new home for her, and that had failed. Instead, he was going to prevent her old home from falling to pieces. As he loved her, he was glad to do it, although until she came he had not felt very light-hearted. The risk of loss appeared greater to him than he could admit to Mr. Frere. He thought worse of his old friend's health, and worse of his prospects, than he liked to say. Dick's business conscience pricked him; his private conscience applauded and encouraged. The two were at war till Hilary came. After all, Dick told himself as he looked at her, if he chose to give up a sum of money for her sake, even though she would not marry him, it was no man's business to call him a fool. All the money he made might have been hers, had she only nodded her pretty head.

CHAPTER IX.

BAD NEWS

ONE hot evening toward the end of August Hilary had taken her books into the garden and was trying to read there. The Freres had not gone to Northerney. Indeed, they had not been away at all. For the first time in their lives the girls were spending August in London instead of on a Swiss mountain top, in a German watering-place, or at the English seaside. Every day their mother proposed a journey, and every day their father managed to stave it off. The discussions were interminable, but so far nothing had come of them but the acquisition of several new guide-books and a lively European correspondence as to terms and suitable accommodation. The girls could not understand why their mother consented to this long delay. Everyone they knew had left town long since. Mrs. Theodore and Sophia were at Pontresina. Arthur Preston was on his way to the Dolomites. Dick Lorimer had gone sea-fishing off the Cornish coast.

Even the daily papers wrote of mountain, moor, and sea. Hilary had stumbled on a leader this very morning that set her longing for salt breezes, for pine forests, for moorland hills, for anything countrified, instead of the stale, dusty streets outside their garden gate. Even her own home seemed in need of a cleansing air; at any rate, everyone in it looked jaded and irritable. The Greek play was making little progress. Hilary had taken it into the garden to-night, but she felt languid and disinclined for work, and before she had considered three lines her mother appeared.

"I can't think what makes your father so late," she said.

Hilary put down her book and stared absently across the garden. Their usual dinner hour had gone by, and there was no sign yet of Mr. Frere.

"Perhaps he went to Cook's to get those return tickets," she suggested.

"I'm afraid not, my dear. He said only this morning that he hadn't the money for them. It is really dreadful. We cannot do without a change. He does not see that it is an absolute necessity. I am sure I do not go away for pleasure; I am always glad to get home again."

"I don't understand the sudden difficulty," said Hilary. "Father's circumstances have not altered, have they?"

"That is just what you never know with a business man. You have to guess at their affairs from their tempers. It is very trying. The wife of a man who has a fixed income can cut her coat according to her cloth; but although I stint and save, as a matter of duty, I always feel that it is trouble thrown away. What is the good of choosing cheap fish for dinner when a single telegram that very day may have lost you thousands?"

"Perhaps father has been losing money," said Hilary.

"I dare say. Of course, we have both had our disappointments."

She sighed, and Hilary opened her book again. It was in this roundabout way that Mrs. Frere reproached her daughter over and over again in the twenty-four hours. She could not help feeling that things were going a little wrong. Her prayers to fortune were so modest, and yet they seemed unheard; that Hilary should marry Herr Hansen, that Arthur should declare himself, that Mr. Frere should keep his health and spirits—surely to ask for these events to happen was not to ask for much. They wanted a lucky breeze, and Mrs. Frere wished

she could puff out her cheeks like a cherub, and blow one the right way. It vexed her to see Nell droop, and even fade a little.

"Perhaps Arthur will not marry until next year," she said to Hilary. "The Stock Exchange is very flat just now."

She often made a remark of this kind to her elder daughter. In some mysterious way it seemed to afford her relief to speak of Nell's marriage to Arthur as a certainty, even while she fretted over its delay.

Hilary looked pensively across the lawn at Nell, who was watering a bed of parched geraniums, although the clouds were gathering for rain.

"I don't believe much in Arthur," she said.

"I can't think why."

Hilary was saved for the moment from the difficulties of an explanation. A servant came across the lawn to ask whether dinner should be served, and to say that the cook wanted some vanilla for a sauce. Mrs. Frere ordered dinner at once, and went back to the house to get the vanilla out of her store-room.

By the time dinner was over the three women felt almost anxious about Mr. Frere. He never stayed in the City to an unusual hour without sending a telegram or a clerk with a message. Why had he not done so to-day? Besides, he never stayed at his office until ten o'clock. Such a thing had not happened once since they were married, said Mrs. Frere. He had long since given up his club.

"Suppose he has been run over? How should we know it?" inquired his wife.

The girls thought someone would be from the hospital to tell them, but they persuaded their mother not to sit at a front window and watch for a hospital messenger. Their father had probably gone to dine in town with a friend. It was contrary to his habits, but not quite impossible. Hilary could remember an occasion when Dick's father had arrived from India, and carried off Mr. Frere from the office to the Café

Royal. She remembered the telegram coming to explain his absence.

"That is what I mean," said Mrs. Frere. "He has always sent a telegram."

The evening had grown more and more oppressive. The girls sat out on the veranda, and stared at the black sky. In the heavy silence that heralded a storm every sound outside reached them with unaccustomed clearness. Mrs. Frere was too restless to sit down. She listened for her husband's latchkey, and twice went to the door on a false alarm. Very soon it began to lighten, and that increased her uneasiness. The girls were driven back to the drawing room, and found it difficult to breathe there. They opened the piano, but a crash of thunder startled them away. Nell had said she would sing, but she could not chirp through a storm like this; it sounded right over their heads. The rain had not come yet, and between the peals there was a breathless silence. They heard the postman's knock, and then a fresh flash blinded them for an instant, while the crash of the thunder seemed within the room.

"That was a letter," said Hilary, "and no one brings it. I dare say the servants are afraid."

She ran into the front hall and took the letter out of the box. It was only a package of patterns for Nell. But as she stood there someone came up the steps and rang, and with a swift dread of bad news, with the wish to intercept it, she opened the door. To her surprise she saw Dick Lorimer standing outside. He came in.

"I thought you were in Cornwall," she said.

"I got back three days ago."

They shook hands, and then Hilary turned toward the drawing room.

"Isn't your father smoking?" said Dick. "I rather want to see him."

He was close to the "library" door, and he stopped there as if he wished to go in. He looked at Hilary for permission to do so.

"Father has not come home," explained Hilary.
"We can't think where he is."

"May I wait for him?" said Dick.

"Of course. Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Have you seen him to-day?"

"Yes."

Hilary noticed that Dick hesitated slightly before he replied. She turned round swiftly and faced him.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked, trying as she spoke to read the truth in his face. What she read there did not reassure her. His eyes were full of pity; and his glance was grave.

"Your father has business worries," he said evasively.

Hilary did not press her question further. It was impossible to ask Dick for information about her father's affairs; but she felt uneasy. They went into the drawing room together, and Mrs. Frere asked him what he meant by coming out in the midst of such a storm. He had no plausible answer ready, and as he tried to invent one he saw Hilary staring at him in bewilderment. Luckily the storm came to his aid. When conversation is interrupted once a minute by a clap of thunder it is apt to grow erratic. One flash of lightning was terrible. Nell buried her head in the sofa cushions after it, and Mrs. Frere suggested that they should all adjourn to the "library," where there were closed shutters and thick curtains. As they filed into the hall they heard the rain begin, a sudden heavy downpour driving against the window panes. Mrs. Frere said that the library fire should be lighted, in case her husband came home wet through. This was done. Dick was allowed to smoke. Whisky and mineral waters were placed on the table. The room looked well lighted, warm, and cheerful; the blaze of the fire was pleasant to see.

"It might be a winter evening," said Nell. "This room gets very stuffy in winter, worse than it is to-

night; but you look like summer, Dick. Anyone can see you have lived in a boat lately. What was the place like? Would it do for us?"

"It was roughish," said Dick.

"You are quite bronzed," said Hilary, looking at him contemplatively. "You make me think of the sea. I know what you have been doing. You have taken your boat into caves, and heard the waves plash against the sides, and then you have come out into the sunshine again; you have watched the gulls, and you have been drenched by spray; you have lived on fresh fish and salt air. I wish we could go off to-morrow, anyhow—anywhere. London in August is terrible. Let us go off to-morrow, mamma, and get brown and blistered like Dick. I can't think why we are all sitting here to-night."

"I am so unhappy about your father," said Mrs. Frere. "Where can he be?"

She had unfastened one corner of the shutters, and, half hidden by the heavy curtain, she stood close to the window on the watch.

Hilary felt convinced that Dick was uneasy, too. She knew him too well to be misled by his quiet manner. He smoked his pipe; he filled himself a glass of whisky and Apollinaris; he sat still in his chair; but Hilary observed that he listened to every sound outside, and that, in spite of the late hour, he seemed determined to stay on.

"I'm afraid you won't get much talk with father when he does come home," she said.

"I'm afraid not," said Dick.

Their eyes met in conflict. He understood that she wondered why he did not bid good-by and go, and she understood that he meant to stay and give no reason.

"It is nearly midnight," said Nell, looking at the clock. "I'm so sleepy."

Mrs. Frere heard what the girl said and came away from the window. She begged her daughters to go to bed. Nell consented to do so, but Hilary said that she preferred to sit up.

"Why do you stay?" she asked Dick a few minutes later, when they were left to themselves. Nell had gone to bed, and Mrs. Frere was giving some final orders to the servants. Dick looked at her.

"I'll go, if you like," he said.

"Nonsense, Dick! You know what I mean. You stay because you think something has gone wrong. What do you fear?"

"I can't tell you," said Dick, after some deliberation. "Nothing. I saw your father to-day, and—I expect he's all right. He'll be here in a minute, and then I'll go."

"I have sent the servants to bed," said Mrs. Frere, coming back into the room. "Your father is sure to have dined."

She stood still on the threshold, the door wide open, her hand upraised and pointing behind her toward the hall.

"Listen! What is that?" she cried.

They all three heard a slow, dragging step come as far as the front door, and then shuffle heavily away again out of the garden gate and down the road.

"I'll go and see," said Dick.

He hurried off, shutting the front door after him; but the two women opened it, and stood on the top step listening anxiously. There was no traffic in the road at this late hour, and the rain fell quietly now. Hilary could hear Dick overtake the man who had been within their gates a moment since; she could hear two voices, and then two persons coming slowly back. She ran down the steps, across the small front garden to the road. Dick had just arrived at the nearest gas lamp, and she saw that it was her father clinging to his arm. She ran on, unmindful of the rain, and then suddenly stopped short. What ailed her father? He seemed hardly able to walk. He was drenched with rain and shivering; his face looked white and wild; his eyes met hers without interest, almost without recognition.

"What has happened?" she said, under her breath, to Dick.

"He has been out in the storm."

Hilary caught her father's free hand. It was as cold as ice. When they got to the house and Mrs. Frere saw her husband's condition, she immediately showed great alarm.

"What is the matter, Henry?" she cried. "Come in to the fire. Was it you who came to the door just now and went away again?"

"Yes," said Mr. Frere, with a groan.

He let Dick take off his dripping greatcoat, and then he followed his wife into the library. There he sank into a chair and stared silently at the fire, rubbing his hands all the while, and giving little shivering sighs that terrified his wife. She stood close by and looked at him helplessly. Dick mixed some strong whisky and water, and steadied the glass while Mr. Frere drank it. Hilary wished that she had thought of doing that.

"Where *have* you been?" said Mrs. Frere, when she had waited some time in vain for her husband to speak.

His haggard eyes turned miserably toward his wife. He seemed about to answer her, and then, as if the words choked him, he stopped short and said to Dick: "Tell them. I can't."

Dick, looking greatly troubled and perplexed, sat down near his old friend.

"You want rest and sleep now," he said. "No need for any explanations to-night."

"Yes, yes; there is! only I don't know how to do it. That's why I stayed away. I don't know how to tell them."

"Don't keep us in suspense, Dick," said Hilary, with a touch of indignation.

"Your father is anxious about the future," said the young man, after a pause that showed he found it difficult to begin. He looked almost relieved when Mrs. Frere interrupted him.

"You'll worry yourself into your grave, if you don't take care, Henry," she urged affectionately. "How could you go wandering about the streets in the rain when you knew we were waiting dinner for you! I can see by your boots that you have walked for miles through the mud. Tell us what is the matter, and then go to bed. I shan't let you go to the office to-morrow; you look quite ill. I suppose Mr. Theodore has been losing your money again; it seems all he can do for the firm. But if he thinks you are going to work yourself to death, and do without your holiday——"

"You're wrong," said Mr. Frere grimly. "He wants me to have the holiday and not the work. He has told me so to-day."

"How nice of him!" exclaimed Mrs. Frere. "I should never have given him credit for it. Then what are you worrying about?"

Mr. Frere did not reply. His wife looked from him to her daughter, from her to Dick. She caught the alarm in their faces; she felt that their silence meant no good.

"What is it?" she said, beginning to tremble.

Dick felt driven to explain. "Mr. Theodore will not renew the partnership," he said. "He means to carry on the business by himself."

He looked at the ground as he spoke, but he felt Mrs. Frere's eyes on him, and he knew that what he said only reached her comprehension by degrees. A heavy, interminable silence followed before she opened her lips.

"I always knew he was a scoundrel," she said slowly. Then she leaned over her husband, and the tears gathered in her loving, faded eyes.

"Henry!" she whispered. "Never mind, old heart. We'll get on somehow."

Dick had gone to the window, and turned his back on his friends. Hilary had gone close to her father.

"I could not come home and tell you," said Mr. Frere. "I cannot bear it. You will starve."

"What did he say to you?" asked Mrs. Frere. "Did you remind him that you made the business? I hope you told him what you thought of him."

"No," said her husband; "I asked him to keep me on at a fixed salary."

"Oh!" cried Hilary, and then stopped herself. She looked at her father, and understood in a dim way that he had fallen on his knees before his enemy to beg for his children's bread. He had begged in vain, and his failure had broken him.

"But you are so clever, Henry," began his wife. "You can easily begin a new business, or else someone will give you a thousand a year to manage theirs. We could not live on in this house, and we have the lease for another three years, but——"

"Is it possible that even now you don't understand?" said Mr. Frere, pressing his hands to his temples with an air of desperation. "We are ruined—ruined! If I get a clerkship, I shall be lucky. My health has gone. I am old. Everything is over—for me."

He got up and looked tenderly at his wife. "We have been married twenty-one years," he said, "and every day has brought us nearer to this."

"We have been very happy for twenty-one years," said Mrs. Frere stanchly.

"I wanted to see them again," continued her husband. He addressed Dick, and then glanced at his wife and daughter. His tone was almost apologetic, but his eyes were dazed, and he turned silent and troubled, like a man in a fever, who thinks he has spoken a secret thought aloud. Dick felt sure that his old friend had wandered hither and thither that night with the thought of suicide in his mind.

"You must rest now," urged the young man. "Let me help you upstairs."

Mrs. Frere followed them. Hilary sat down by the fire. Presently Dick returned and sat down beside her.

"What will happen?" said the girl, looking at him with desolate eyes.

"Don't think about it to-night," he answered gently. "You can do nothing, you know."

"I know," said Hilary. "I can do nothing. I am only a girl."

Dick looked at her rather wistfully, but her eyes did not meet his. She was staring into the fire.

"I don't see what you could do, if you were a man," he said, after a time, "unless, of course, you had money."

"A man can always make money. A thousand ways are open to him, if he has strength and sense."

"Not at an hour's notice. Not without a struggle. I have worked hard for ten years, and I am only just beginning to see my way."

"But you can never have felt quite helpless—as I do now. I feel like a rat in a trap. There is no escape. You say yourself there is nothing to be done. We shall have to bear it. Suppose father gets no work next year? He has often told us of men who lost a berth, and could not get another. He used to help them. They were glad to borrow a sovereign; they had wives and children who were starving at home. Shall we starve? Oh! how can it be possible? Surely I have wits enough, and strength enough to earn my bread?"

"You are looking too far forward," said Dick. "Your father will probably find something to do. He is a very clever man of business."

"But he looks so ill."

"It is no joke for a man to have to tell his wife and children what he has told you to-night. Can you imagine what it cost him?"

"Do you think he has known for a long time?"

"He has feared it for a long time."

"Mamma always said things would come right."

"They might have done," said Dick.

Hilary thought she understood how. If Arthur Preston had declared himself, if she had accepted Herr Hansen or Dick, her father's affairs would not have been desperate. With his two children married

to prosperous men, he could have held his head up as he walked out of his old business, and looked leisurely for some post big enough to support himself and his wife. It need not have been very big.

She looked at Dick, and tried to speak, but her heart began to beat so wildly that she could not say a word. She looked away from him and waited, wondering, in the silence that ensued, whether he saw any signs of the commotion that shook her. He did not come to her aid.

"Dick!" she said quite suddenly; "let us help him. I would do anything to help him."

She waited one breathless moment for his reply, stared at him as if he had dealt her the most cruel blow, and turned ashen white. He thought she was going to faint, and put out his hands toward her, but she shivered away from him and lay back in her chair with closed eyes. How was this moment ever to be wiped out?

Dick had dimly understood. He had even looked at her with sudden hope, but by that time her eyes were averted, her face had changed from white to flaming red. She did not see the hope rise and die away again as he watched her; she only felt that his silence thrust her from him, and that while it lasted she was consumed by shame. Every moment seemed to carry her further from her old, familiar friend. It was, after all, a strange young man sitting at her elbow. She had offered herself to him, and he had not responded. The tension became unbearable. She got up. As she did so Mrs. Frere threw the door open and appeared for a moment on the threshold of the room. She could hardly speak. She beckoned Hilary to go with her, and she said to Dick in a dry, choking voice: "A doctor! He is dying. He is dead."

Dick flew. Hilary ran upstairs to the door of her father's room, and then stood still outside it, listening fearfully. She heard him breathe, and went in. He lay on his bed insensible, with glazed, unseeing eyes.

His wife came back and began to cry bitterly as she hung over him. The sound of her sobs seemed not to reach him; at any rate he gave no sign. Hilary stood beside the bed and wondered whether this was death. The rain pattered against the window, the room looked just as it had done since she had known it, but every breath her father drew sounded more terrible than the last. Every moment deepened her conviction that he was bidding good-by to life and to them. It was a hundred years since yesterday, when the future had looked so fair. So suddenly do the Furies enter a household, and where they enter they love to stay.

CHAPTER X

REALITIES

No one of ordinary intelligence will refuse to admit that he is mortal ; and yet a great many people behave as if their life in this world would probably be everlasting. Men cherish the most lively affection for their wives and children, and die with their affairs in unpardonable confusion ; women urge their husbands to spend an income considerably larger than the capital that would be at their disposal if he died to-morrow, and no one offers to lock these lunatics in asylums, although the harm they do to themselves and others is deeper, more lasting, and more various than the worst that could be wreaked by many a poor creature living under his keeper's eye. But it is not necessary to have a wide or a profound knowledge of human nature to understand that fools are as common as sinners ; and, indeed, the admission of folly is best made, like the confession of sin, on Sundays, in a chorus from which no man's voice is absent.

Of course, there are people who think they invariably act with wisdom, but they are in an unamiable minority, and need not be taken into account. Most of us have grace enough to blush at some memories. However, there is no doubt that a man's taste in follies, as in dress and furniture, may differ importantly from his neighbor's. You condemn what your friend condones, and what you smile at he refuses to endure. The girl you perceive to be a mere millinery peg he endows with angel's wings, and marries ; but he cannot understand your trick of fetching your guests from the byways. And the most curious part of the matter is, that the millinery peg suits him, and

the blatherskite you, for the term of your natural lives. It was truly a merciful fate that made men as various in their likes and dislikes as they are in their fortunes.

To some minds it seems impossible that grown-up people should live without any care for the morrow—that a man should love his wife and children devotedly, and yet leave them without daily bread. It seems impossible, even while one's eyes are fixed in wondering amazement on people who lead irresponsible, spendthrift lives; it is so difficult to believe that a human being can play the butterfly with such satisfaction to himself. Of course, the difficulty is made by one's own unsympathetic mind, and does not depend on the rarity or the uncertainty of the facts. In the human world butterflies are exceeding plentiful. Very often they lead a gorgeous, untroubled life; whether they flourish to the last depends on the weather encountered by the way. There is no doubt that the poor, pretty creatures sometimes find themselves in cruel circumstances. "Winter!" they have always cried. "Don't talk of it—don't think of it! We do not believe it exists. The days are warm and long, and, like sensible creatures, we enjoy them. What do you say about providing for bad weather? We have no time to listen or understand. All the flowers in the garden are waiting for us. We love their colors and their perfume. Look at our own colors, how they embellish the summer day." So they flit gayly past you, and you watch and wait uneasily. Then autumn comes, and they shiver; winter, and they die. And I have never found that the spectacle of their sufferings is made less painful by the reflection that they have brought it all on themselves. To the victims it assuredly brings no relief. Besides, they deny the impeachment with indignation.

Mrs. Frere had certainly helped to bring misfortunes on the children and herself. The argument that her husband need not have permitted her to do so will occur to bachelors of both sexes. To married

folk its hollowness will be plain. Men who love their wives are so much in their hands for bad or good. "As the husband is, the wife is!" But a man wrote that. Moreover, the young man from whose lips the saying issued was not married, nor were his thoughts taken up with housekeeping expenses. He was quite in a state of mind to deny their importance.

Perhaps you imagine that Mrs. Frere looked back with repentance, and resigned herself to the fruits of her folly. If so, you give her credit for a reasonableness of which she has hitherto shown no sign. People who do not expect both to eat and to have their cake are rare. Mrs. Frere would not recognize that she had nibbled with fatal destructiveness at hers. She said it was iniquitous if the widow of a man who had worked as hard and as well as Mr. Frere was not left well provided for. I think she was right. Only most of the iniquity happened to be hers.

At first she had only glanced with a foreboding shudder at the troubles ahead. As long as her husband lay there, still with some breath of life in him, she could not believe that he would die. Her strength spent itself in watching by him, her thoughts drifted back to a past that led through such dear days to this intolerable end. She did not know how to let him go, how to stay stricken and desolate behind. When she saw the change in his face she stooped and whispered in his unconscious ears that she was with him; and then, in a moment, as she kissed him, he was gone. She had no time, and hardly the wish, to call the children. He died at dawn, when they were both out of the room. She sat by him, his hand growing cold in hers. Her thoughts traveled to and fro. It seemed such a little while since the first time she had seen him. It was the coming day that looked long.

But, of course, the sun never sets on a day that has not broken more hearts than one; and in the case of a woman who has been as silly as Mrs. Frere most people are inclined to forget her grief and consider

her reverses. The girls wept with her. Dick Lorimer took the management of the funeral off her hands. For a few days the three stricken women were allowed to mourn unmolested, as if the loss of husband and father was the only trouble that had befallen them. But Mrs. Frere's widowhood was hardly a week old when the whole bitterness of her position was made properly clear to her by Mr. Harrison, her husband's solicitor. He called on her the day after the funeral, and, of course, he began with one or two conventional expressions of condolence. It soon became evident, however, that the grief that had worn Mrs. Frere white and wan already was, in his opinion, less important than the financial ruin in which she was deservedly involved. The fact is, Mr. Theodore had prepared him to encounter three silly, unreasonable women, and had urged him to hammer out the truth. Mr. Harrison was also solicitor to the firm, and had its interests truly at heart. Mr. Theodore and the firm were now, to all intents and purposes, one.

"You have always spent every penny your late husband made," he was soon saying. "Last year you spent more. Mr. Frere was in debt to the firm. The business has been crippled for want of funds."

"It will be crippled now for want of brains," retorted Mrs. Frere.

Mr. Harrison paused, as if to wait for an unmeaning but troublesome noise to pass away, then he continued :

"On your husband's business you have no claim. There would be absolutely no provision for you if, two years ago, I had not luckily persuaded Mr. Frere to insure his life for a thousand pounds. By his will, made at the birth of his first child, his property is in trust for the children, and can only be touched in case of their marriage. The furniture, plate, and linen are yours, and will, of course, sell for something."

Mr. Harrison cast an appraising glance round the morning room.

"You must not expect much," he said. "People will hardly buy old furniture nowadays."

"Do you mean to say that my husband had no money in the business?" asked Mrs. Frere. She drew closer to the fire as she spoke. The room in that wet, gloomy weather always felt chilly.

"Nothing worth speaking of. A little over two hundred, perhaps. Your debts will probably amount to that."

"We have no debts," said Hilary. "Have we, mamma?"

"There are the tradesmen's bills. Every family has tradesmen's bills. They do not like ready money. But what are we to live on, Mr. Harrison?"

"I have not gone into the accounts yet, but I should think there will be nearly fifty pounds a year for you," said Mr. Harrison, getting up to go.

Mrs. Frere burst into tears. The lawyer pretended not to see, and walked to the door,—a crying woman is even worse company than an angry one,—but Hilary stopped him.

"Who are my father's executors?" she asked.

"Mr. Theodore and myself."

"Mr. Theodore!" echoed Mrs. Frere in surprise.

"Bless me," said Mr. Harrison, turning round again, "didn't you know? Did your husband tell you nothing?"

"I dare say he did, but I never wished to hear about such things. I never have worried about the future. God alone knows what will happen."

"Well," said Mr. Harrison, "for my part I knew pretty well what would happen, two years ago, when your husband told me the state of his affairs. The poor man was breaking his heart over them then."

"But what are we to do?" asked Mrs. Frere again. She looked terrified, dazed, appealing. Mr. Harrison shrugged his shoulders.

"There are thousands of families in England who live on a pound a week," he said, and then he got away. It is always irritating to observe that people

who have brought trouble on themselves still hope for help and sympathy. Everyone ought to lie uncomplainingly on the bed he has made for himself. Mrs. Frere certainly could not expect much sympathy from anyone who knew how foolish she had been. Of course, the girls would tumble into the gutter with her, and that seemed a pity: but they probably took after their mother in vanity and feebleness. At any rate, children must suffer for the sins of their parents. No one but a latter-day unbeliever would object to that law as unjust, and even he would admit that it is, at any rate, in complete and plentiful exercise. His creed and his profession both helped to harden Mr. Harrison's heart.

For some time after he had gone the three women sat together and scarcely spoke. The girls had listened in dry-eyed silence. Every word the man uttered wrung youth and hope out of them. They felt scared at being alive. What could they do with life? how support it? how satisfy its imperious demands? A pound a week for the three! A month ago Arthur had asked Nell if a young couple could begin with five hundred a year, and she had looked very wise and said they might, perhaps, if they lived in a cottage, and were very careful with coals and bread. Hilary had spent a pound a week on odds and ends. She had never managed to pay her dress-maker's bills out of that allowance. What were they to do? Should they hire a laborer's cottage and live in it? Thoreau did not spend a pound a week at Walden; and how often, in the midst of some dull, pompous dinner-party, Hilary's thoughts had flown to that pleasant hut, with the scent of bean flowers coming in at the door, and the whippoorwills singing on the stump outside. She saw the deep pond in the forest; she saw the spreading pine, the red squirrel, the woodcock with her young, and the turtle-doves at play.

"We must find a cottage," she said. "The rent must not exceed half a crown a week. There will be seventeen and six left for other things."

But Hilary got no further. Mrs. Frere and Nell stared at her as if they feared she was demented, and she perceived the impossibility of even attempting such a life with them. Indeed, as she looked it in the face, its charm vanished and left a thousand hardships behind. How could a few shillings supply three of them with food, warmth, and clothing? Where would help and medicine come from when they were ill; wine for her mother, or such costly necessities as boots, clean linen, meat, and fires? She stretched out her hands and wondered whether they would ever accomplish the family washing. Her heart sank as she thought of it. She had less muscular strength than most girls of her generation. In a few minutes, after considering one or two of the uppermost details, Hilary came back to the plan that was, of course, the obvious, commonplace one—Nell and she must teach.

"Yes," she said, "we must teach. I don't know what, and I don't know whom, but that is evidently our career, unless I take to cooking; but that requires training and skill. I have neither time nor money to spare, so I will teach. In England there are many people who suppose that teaching, like reading and writing, comes by nature. I will persuade some nice Mrs. Dogberry to engage me. You must find Mrs. Verges, Nell. We will send mamma our money. What am I worth? Shall I only get a comfortable home in a Christian family at first, or will someone give me twelve pounds? Oh, mamma! what can you not do with twelve pounds a year?"

The girl tried to laugh, but her mirth was not convincing, and she found that Mrs. Frere would not listen to her plans. Part from her girls as well as from her husband? Hilary might as well suggest that she should part from her heart or her head. Her very life hung on them. Let her children go out among strangers and waste their strength in stuffy schoolrooms—expose themselves to slights and snubs—grow old before their time, and weary while they were

still young—she had not educated them for such an existence as that! Hilary could not help reflecting that this was true in more senses than one. Nell, in spite of her little accomplishments, was an ignorant puss; and she herself had frittered away her time in the desultory fashion that comes so easy to us all.

“But what *are* we to do?” she said at last. “Here we sit, three live healthy women, hungry three times a day, cold three parts of the year, wanting clothes to cover us. We can’t help being alive, and life means needs. How are we to supply them?”

“Do thousands of families live on a pound a week?” asked Nell, who knew as little about money as most girls of her age and position.

“Mrs. Theodore will be glad,” cried Mrs. Frere. “She will say it serves us right, even if we die of starvation. And Henry will not know—ah! if he knew—my husband—my husband!”

“She will not be glad,” said Hilary. “She will simply not think of us at all. We shall belong to the disagreeable subjects that she likes to keep out of her mind. She will do what is pretty and proper in the way of a civil note and an occasional invitation, and beyond that we may all go to the devil for anything she cares.”

She reflected a moment, and then added less bitterly: “And you can’t blame her either. Why should she trouble about us?”

Nell had got up and was standing before a silver-framed mirror, examining her pretty image in the glass.

“Am I a disagreeable subject?” she said, with whimsical melancholy. “I don’t look it, do I, Hilary?”

Hilary, who had risen some time before, approached her sister and looked over her shoulder. Their mother, from where she sat, could see both the girls and their reflection. She could not imagine anything prettier, but she could not imagine them torn from

the surroundings in which their loveliness had ripened. She began to cry again.

The first person who brought hope and comfort to them that day was Dick. He came straight from the City, and for once helped Mrs. Frere through the hour that as long as she lived was a heavy one. All day she had been used to miss her husband, but between five and six she had listened for his key in the latch. She used to listen now and start at a chance sound. Dick brought his friends a basket of peaches, and the little gift stirred them in a way he could hardly understand. The City keeps up a pretty fashion of sending little luxuries by the hands of its workers to the women folk at home. Now that the father and husband was dead the Freres had not supposed that anyone would come in at eventide, bringing fruit and flowers. There were early chrysanthemums as well as peaches in Dick's hands. He sat down as if he meant to stay some time, and listened attentively to Mrs. Frere's account of the lawyer's visit.

"You have not seen Mr. Theodore?" he asked.

"No," said Mrs. Frere; "I hope I shall never see him again. I consider that he murdered my husband. The worst villains of all never get within sight of the gallows."

Dick had seen Mr. Theodore the day after Mr. Frere's death. He had called at the office, by appointment, late in the afternoon. A memorandum had been found relating to the two thousand pounds paid for Fagin's Trust Shares. Mr. Theodore professed great indignation at discovering that his penniless partner had speculated on the Stock Exchange. Dick said he had been greatly grieved to hear of it too—as the speculation had turned out a rotten one. Mr. Theodore explained that even with the help of the life insurance, and after the sale of his household goods, the property left by the deceased would not amount to anything like two thousand pounds. There was a considerable business debt, and probably a large number of private ones. When these were met

there might be rather more than a thousand pounds left, which the issuer of the bill could, of course, claim. For the rest of the borrowed money Dick would unfortunately be responsible.

Dick asked what would become of Mrs. Frere and her daughters, in case every penny they possessed was taken from them. Mr. Theodore said he had no idea. He confessed that the question did not greatly interest him. He had a keen sense of justice, and in his opinion people who could not help themselves were not worthy of help. No man can do more than a little for some of his neighbors, and Mr. Theodore preferred to spend his surplus on deserving objects. Could he sit still and see those ladies driven into a workhouse? Well, he had read only the other day that workhouse life was most healthy. Besides, in these days, when so many careers are open to women, why should there be any question of lazy subsistence on the public purse? Why should Mrs. Frere and her children not earn their living as thousands of women, equally spoiled, have had to do? He would advise them to take situations at once, and not spend an unnecessary day in the house that was actually being supported at Mr. Lorimer's cost.

Dick did not lose his temper at once. He used every device he could think of to squeeze a promise of help out of Mr. Theodore, to make him do something for his late partner's widow and children. It was of no avail. The two men had never liked each other, and their old animosity seemed to find fuel at every stage of the discussion. They parted on worse terms than ever. Dick declared that he would meet the bill he had backed and not wring a penny toward it out of the three women on the brink of destitution. Mr. Theodore commended his generosity, with a sneer that made Dick burn to hit out at him. With a somewhat cavalier air he forbade Mr. Theodore to mention the matter to anyone concerned, and he marched out of the office in a tearing rage, feeling more like an ass than a

hero. He had interfered and failed. He wished he had never said a word, never gone near the place. He had done more harm than good ; set Theodore's back up, and driven him to swear he would do nothing for those poor women. It was an oath the man would be glad to keep, too. Dick wondered what on earth would become of them. He himself felt powerless, paralyzed by this coming loss of two thousand pounds. He could not think of marriage now. It would be all he could do to carry on his business and live.

Dick asked Mrs. Frere whether she had seen Mr. Theodore, because it was, of course, just possible that the rich man had softened his heart and made some sign. His wife might have prevailed with him where Dick had been defeated ; or he might still turn out to have more bark than bite. This is a world of surprises ; but Dick would have been surprised out of measure if such a piece of news had greeted him. As it was, he felt that he had known all along how foolish it would be to cherish the faintest hope.

While they were sitting together a maid came in with several letters, which she handed to her mistress. One of them bore a German postmark, and Mrs. Frere opened it first. She scanned it hurriedly, uttered several mysterious exclamations of surprise and pleasure, and then turned to her daughters, the thin, finely written sheet of paper fluttering in her hands.

"It is from your Aunt Bertha," she explained. "She says she will take us all. You see my brother left her pretty well off, though she says she is poor, and in Germany room is not an object. Besides, the closer we three can keep together, the better pleased I shall be ; and don't say you cannot live in Germany before you have tried. You have no idea how delightful Hamburg is. Instead of taking an omnibus to get across the town, you take a steamer, you know. Aunt Bertha says her house is almost in a wood. You remember Aunt Bertha, dears ?"

"Not very well," said Hilary. "Isn't she rather queer?"

"Who is she?" asked Dick. "I have never even heard of her."

"Oh, yes, Dick; you have. She is the widow of mamma's only brother. They lived in Peru. They stayed with us on their way back, five years ago. I don't remember much about her excepting that she was a curiously silent person. She would sit right through dinner and never open her mouth. Father said she gave him the blues."

"Here is her photograph," said Nell, who had fetched an album, and turned over its pages until she found what she wanted.

They all bent over it with newly awakened interest.

"I should stay in England," said Dick, after a prolonged and silent inspection.

"But we can keep together if we accept this invitation," said Mrs. Frere. "It seems sent from heaven."

Dick glanced at Aunt Bertha's photograph again.

"What *can* we do?" cried Hilary. "Mr. Harrison says we had better leave this house to-day than to-morrow."

"Oh, never mind him!" said Dick.

"But he is right. Every day here costs pounds. You do not understand yet. For each of us, in future, there is not quite a shilling a day. Do you know what a leg of mutton costs? I don't; but I have heard that it is a good deal. We want a roof to our heads, and fire, and light. If we go to Aunt Bertha, we shall have breathing time. I can work at German, and get a good situation later on. What can we do here? We can't go about with a barrel organ or sweep a crossing. If we tried to stand in a shop twelve hours a day we should be in a hospital in a month. We might let lodgings, I suppose?"

"Nonsense," said Dick rudely. "You would not make a penny. You are not used to haggle and pilfer."

"We are not used to live on a shilling a day," said Nell. "I should think it wants practice."

Dick fumed. It would have pleased him best to take a little house and bring these three women into it; to work for them and order them as if they were his kin.

"You can't go flying about the world by yourselves, with no money and no man to look after you," he said, regardless of Hilary's gathering resentment.

"We have no man to look after us," she said, "so there is no choice."

"I don't like the plan at all. You hardly know this woman."

"She is my brother's widow," sighed Mrs. Frere. "Poor Hans! she made him very unhappy."

"Well," said Dick, "I shall expect you back in a week or two. Have you many friends left in Hamburg?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Frere. "There are the Werners and Herr Hansen."

Dick looked swiftly at Hilary. Perhaps she would not be back in a week or two. Perhaps Herr Hansen would persuade her to stay in Hamburg altogether. Decidedly this plan of emigration was not one to be encouraged. He got up and went toward the open veranda doors. The garden looked trim and fresh. He stepped outside and considered how he could best lure Hilary to join him there. The tactics he finally adopted were not subtle. He put his head into the room and said: "Hilary, I wish you'd give me some flowers," and directly they were in the garden together he said: "Come and sit in the summer house and talk. I'll help you gather the flowers afterward."

They sat down together, and at first found nothing to say.

"I thought we were to talk," observed Hilary, after a time.

"I don't know where to begin," said Dick. "I hate this Hamburg plan."

"I see you do. I don't know why."

"Suppose you come to grief there?"

"This is absurd," said Hilary impatiently. "We are three grown-up women. Do you suppose we can't take care of ourselves?"

"I don't think you can—without money."

Hilary was silent. There really seemed nothing to say. Words could not alter the situation, so it seemed foolish to waste them.

"You ought to stay here," persisted Dick.

Hilary knew nothing of the check to Dick's fortunes, and she had rather expected him to ask her to marry him there and then. She would have refused indignantly, and told him what she thought of women who married because they needed board and lodging. After the other night it would have afforded her keen satisfaction to refuse him again. Why did he not give her the chance? Had he changed his mind? or seen some other girl who pleased him better, according to the fickle habits of his sex. The idea gave Hilary a pang. She thought she did not want to marry Dick, though ever since the other night she was not as sure of this as she had been, but she was quite positive that she did not want him to marry anyone else. While he remained single he belonged to her in some measure, and the thought of losing him showed her with a flash how much she depended on his affection. Surely she did not love him? Suppose he suddenly put his arm round her shoulders, and drew her to him? Suppose he—kissed her? Would she hate it? She did not know.

Meanwhile Dick fought manfully against his ardent desire to do some such thing as this. He could not marry until he had retrieved his fallen fortunes, so he had determined not to speak of his wishes again just yet. In a little while he might see his way more clearly, and then, if Hilary would consent to engage herself—— He only half believed in her objections to marriage; he had a glimmer of hope that he could overcome them. But if she went to Hamburg, Herr

Hansen would have a long innings, with all the advantages of money, social prestige, and actual presence on his side. For Hilary the chance was a magnificent one. Dick could not deny that. But he grudged her to Herr Hansen with his whole heart.

"Don't go to Hamburg," he entreated. "Stay here, and let me look after your affairs."

Hilary shook her head. When she spoke there was a note of disappointment in her tone.

"We must go," she said resolutely. "There is nothing else to do."

CHAPTER XI.

RATS.

"It is very strange that Arthur has not been to see us," said Mrs. Frere fretfully. "I cannot understand it. I know that he is back, because Dick mentioned having met him more than a week ago. I almost wish we had not accepted Aunt Bertha's invitation. Hamburg is a long way from Kensington, and if once a girl is out of a man's sight! I suppose we could not have stayed on here even with economy."

Mrs. Frere and Hilary were in the morning room on the first floor. They were turning out a cupboard, full of the nondescript rubbish that accumulates from year to year, and from which some persons never like to part.

"We are going in such a hurry," continued Mrs. Frere. "We might very well have waited a few weeks."

"Every day in this house costs more than we can afford," said Hilary, "and there is nothing to wait for."

"You remind me so much of your father, my child. He always took a gloomy view of life. Poor Henry!"

Hilary said nothing.

"If Arthur calls before we go, and if he proposes to Nell, I shall certainly not run away to Hamburg," continued Mrs. Frere, in the obstinate voice that is so often heard on the lips of feeble people. "You see my point, Hilary?" she persisted.

"Oh, yes!" said Hilary rather impatiently, "but I do not think it is a case we need consider."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because Arthur evidently avoids the house now."

"He has not been back long. He has probably

been very busy. Besides, a man naturally hesitates about making love to a girl the very hour her father dies. I wish you were more just to Arthur."

"What is to be done with all these old guide-books?"

"We had better take them with us."

"We shall not want them. We shall have no money for traveling."

"Well, we can always get new ones."

Hilary was still young enough to think that the event which had entirely changed their circumstances would affect their dispositions with equal force. On her own the last few weeks had made an ineffaceable mark. Her whole point of view had shifted, and she still told herself every day that even yet she must look at life from a more modest level. Such a little while ago she had told Dick that money did not trouble her—that it was never on her mind. Suddenly her mind dwelt on it all day; her sleep was broken by dreams of it at night; she went to bed worn out with worry, and woke at all hours weary and incapable of rest; she would not look at the morrow, since the morrow held no pleasant promise; she tried not to look at the future, for it was wrapped in gloom. To-day she was not suffering from actual want, and for to-day she must henceforward live, thankful if it held no new privations.

It was therefore a constant surprise to her to find that their reverses had not affected her mother and Nell in the same real way. They were unhappy, of course, and they sometimes seemed to remember that they were poor. But it never struck them that any day the very necessities of life might be luxuries beyond their reach. Meat, wine, fire, and comfortable clothes—with these they still supplied themselves in a matter-of-course spirit that filled Hilary with amazement and foreboding. She felt ready to walk straight to an attic in a slum and live on a shilling a day, on bread and water if need be, to die of slow starvation rather than plunge into disgraceful diffi-

culties. She sometimes asked herself whether she could live by herself, in this manner, on a third of their income, about seventeen pounds a year, until she got work. But she never thought of it as really possible, because she could not separate her interests from those of her mother and sister. They must sink and swim together. Of course, they must separate sooner or later, when the two girls went out into the world as governesses. Hilary believed that this time-honored resource for the destitute would only grieve her mother mildly. Mrs. Frere did not wish her children to drudge in schoolrooms, but it would trouble her far more deeply to think of Hilary starving alone in a garret.

Meanwhile, all the pleasant details of their old life began to look costly and precious. When she went to bed at night in her pretty room, when the maid came in each morning to bring hot water and let in the light, when she went down to breakfast and saw the table set with flowers, and silver, and dainty food, when she dressed for dinner, she realized with increasing pain that this easy existence was nearly at an end. She could not understand why her mother and sister felt this so faintly. They behaved as if their present troubles were a disagreeable episode. Hilary believed that they would lash and deepen until the victims were submerged.

Of the Theodores they had as yet seen nothing. Mr. Harrison acted as go-between in business matters, and Mrs. Theodore had only lately returned from Paris. But one Sunday, in the afternoon of Mrs. Frere's last day in her old home, when she was sitting with her daughters and Dick, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore and Sophia were shown in. Mrs. Theodore was, as usual, the figure of fashion. She wore pale heliotrope; she carried a parasol of heliotrope chiffon, and as she crossed her feet she showed an elaborate petticoat of silk and lace. Sophia was equally smart, but not equally effective. She sat bolt upright, and looked at people with a self-satisfied simper as vacant as her

conversation, and Mrs. Frere observed at once that she was sunburnt, and that it did not suit her. Near her heavy, swarthy face Hilary and Nell looked like lilies.

"I am only just in time, I know," said Mrs. Theodore. "Mrs. Preston told me you were off to-day. I have only just come back, you know. Dressmakers are such ruffians. They seem to think time is made for them and no one else. I meant to stay two days in Paris; and I hung about there for ten. So you are really going to spend the winter in Hamburg! How jolly! I suppose you'll find all your old friends and relations there?"

"Most of them are dead," said Mrs. Frere.

"Oh! but they'll come to life again. I mean they'll turn up. I am beset by aunts and cousins when I go to Yorkshire. They want me to do shopping for them in London—the brutes! I don't think one ought to feel related to cousins. Is Hamburg a *very* German town?"

"It isn't French or English," said Mrs. Frere.

"What a pity! I wonder whether anyone would be born out of London or Paris, if he could possibly help it. I want to go there some day, though, and hunt up the family pedigree."

"There would be no difficulty about that," replied Mrs. Frere. "I remember your grandfather's shop as well as possible. It was a very fine one, built soon after the great fire. I dare say it is still there."

"How interesting!" said Mrs. Theodore. "I should like to have a photograph of it. But *my* grandfather was a bishop, dear Mrs. Frere."

"Was he?" said Mrs. Frere indifferently. "Did you enjoy Pontresina?"

"Not much. We went to the wrong hotel. It was crowded with Germans."

"Couldn't you move to the right one?"

"No. Quite full. It was a great bore, because several of my friends were there—Mrs. Finch-Brassey, and that poor beautiful Mrs. Bremen, who lost her

husband in such a sad way, and the dear Bishop of Buttermere. And there were we dining opposite a creature who put half his knife down his throat, for all the world like a conjuror. Then, of course, Stanley disappointed us at the last moment, and we had to travel to Paris by ourselves. It was most uncomfortable."

"I am afraid my husband died at an inconvenient time," said Mrs. Frere.

She perceived that Mrs. Theodore wished to avoid outspoken expressions of condolence, and if her manner had been ever so slightly sympathetic, Mrs. Frere would have forgiven her, though to a German the English reserve in offering spoken condolence after a death is hard to understand. Mrs. Theodore had written a civil letter, and considered that she had done what was proper, which was all she cared to do. But her chatter grated on Mrs. Frere, her fine clothes seemed to flaunt themselves. Even Mrs. Frere's last remark did not penetrate her dense self-complacency.

"I wished we had gone away in June," she answered. "Mr. Theodore has had a very trying summer, and even now he says he cannot get a holiday. Don't you think he looks pale and thin?"

"I had not noticed it."

"He does, I assure you. I get quite anxious about him. Of course, he is comparatively a young man. Still, one never knows."

Mr. Theodore and Dick had exchanged a few remarks about the weather, and found it uncommonly difficult to sustain a conversation. They accordingly looked toward the ladies, and listened to what went on in their corner of the room. Mrs. Theodore had lowered her voice while she spoke of her husband's health, but he heard all she said and strolled nearer to her.

"I don't intend to be killed, I assure you," he said with his washed-out smile. "If you show signs of wanting to ruin me, I shall put one of those advertisements in the papers and disclaim your debts."

"I was talking of overwork and not of debts," said his wife.

"Oh! work doesn't kill people," he said, sinking into a chair, as if his muscles would not support him, and crossing his legs; "anxiety does it."

"My husband was killed by overwork and by a shock," said Mrs. Frere, her indignation rising at Mr. Theodore's tone. He looked at her briefly.

"Poor man!" was all he said.

Dick felt furious. A silence followed, during which Mrs. Frere's agitation was painfully visible; and then Sophia Theodore, who had not spoken before, said in her queer, hoarse voice:

"Has Arthur Preston been here? I saw him at the theater last night. He said he was coming to bid you good-by this afternoon."

"He has not been here," said Hilary. She saw Nell turn white and then red.

"He is going round the world, you know," said Mrs. Theodore.

"Yes," observed Sophia; "I wish he would take me with him."

"Sophia!" said her sister-in-law sharply.

"I like traveling," explained Sophia.

"I think it is so sensible of him to go now while he has no ties," continued Mrs. Theodore. "A young man ought to see the world."

"I don't know that a globe-trotter necessarily sees much of it," said Dick. He perceived that the Freres were concerned to hear of this intended journey. The words were hardly out of his mouth when the young man in question entered the room.

Mrs. Frere got up to greet him. She wished that the Theodores would go now, but they did not seem inclined to do so. On the contrary, Mrs. Theodore invited Arthur to sit down near her, and engaged him in conversation. She said that she had a great deal of information to give him, as she had spent a winter in India herself.

This went on for some time. Mrs. Theodore

chattered. Arthur listened. The three girls made desultory remarks. The two men, Mr. Theodore and Dick, grew restless ; so did Mrs. Frere. She saw with vexation that the afternoon light shone unbecomingly on Nell, exposing more than need be the havoc made by the last few weeks in the girl's good looks. Seen thus, the change was startling. She had grown thin and hollow-eyed ; her color had fled ; her black gown did not suit her. She sat there silently, and hardly glanced at Arthur ; but her mother could see that the child felt his presence in every fiber of her body, and that it cost her an immense effort to make no sign.

"Did you know that we were leaving London to-night?" said Hilary, when at last there was a lull.

"Yes," Arthur acknowledged ; "I thought I'd like to say good-by. I'm going away myself directly. When do you come back?"

"Probably never," said Nell, looking straight at him for the first time.

"You must come and see us in Hamburg," said Mrs. Frere.

"When people leave London they vanish," observed Mrs. Theodore, with a sweeping gesture of her hands. "You had better come back, Mrs. Frere."

She got up as she spoke and shook hands with her hostess, said they had made quite a visitation, hoped the journey would not be a cold one, begged the girls to write sometimes and assure their London friends that they were not forgotten. Then she turned to Arthur, and asked him to drive back with them and dine, an invitation which he accepted with promptness and relief. She asked Mr. Lorimer why he never came to see her, but did not wait for his reply. She gave Hilary and Nell each a little peck on one cheek, a familiarity that took them by surprise, and then she rustled out of the room, still chattering to Arthur, as she went downstairs, of a certain tin-lined trunk that she proposed to lend him for the voyage.

Directly they were gone Nell burst into tears. She

buried her head in the sofa cushions and sobbed hopelessly. Her mother tried to comfort her.

"Come away," said Hilary to Dick. "Come round the garden. I want to bid it good-by."

She led the way to a corner she counted especially her own, where she had grown her favorite flowers. She began to gather some, and arranged them in her hands, but Dick felt that her thoughts were with her sister upstairs.

"Why are you here, Dick?" she said suddenly. "Go away. Come for a ten minutes' call and then depart forever. No one will blame you—on the contrary."

"I never thought much of young Preston," returned Dick. "A selfish cub!"

Hilary was still stooping over the flower-bed, moving slowly from one patch to the next. Dick followed her until they arrived at a garden seat; then he sat down, thinking of to-morrow afternoon when she would have sped miles away.

"I would give you a bunch," she began, holding those she had gathered toward him, "but I know you would put them into a bedroom tumbler half-full of water with all their heads squashed level."

"What are *you* going to do with them?"

"Take them with me."

She picked some clove carnations, found her bunch over large for one hand already, and sat down next to Dick to rearrange them.

"But what is the good?" she cried dejectedly. "It is like putting a purse into a coffin. I can't really take them or anything else with me. Dick! you know more of men than I do. What did Arthur's visit mean? and his journey round the world? Has he deserted Nell?"

"It looks like it," admitted Dick unwillingly.

"I suppose that is what we have to expect—of everyone—now that we are poor. No one will be glad to see us or wish to have more to do with us than they can help. I think we are wise to leave

London. We should have felt the change at every turn—seen it reflected on every face.” She stopped, considered, and then said, with some compunction, “Except on yours, Dick.”

“You mustn’t be blue,” said Dick. “It’s no good.”

“Well,” she sighed, “we had better go back to the house. There are several things to do still.”

“Wait a bit,” urged Dick. “You’ll write sometimes, won’t you?”

“Yes, we will write certainly ; but so must you. Of course, there is never anything in a man’s letters. Still they will come from England. There will be an English air about them. I believe we shall die of home-sickness over there.”

“I hope you will be driven back again,” said Dick.

“We should have to walk back, I think,” said Hilary, “unless I find some way of making money.”

“I shall be over there before Christmas, for a day or two. I shall come and see you.”

“That will be something to look forward to,” said Hilary.

Now that the moment of their separation was so near, Dick felt sorely tempted to say a word of his wishes for the future again. Two considerations held him back now, as they had held him on the evening before Mr. Frere died. He did not believe that Hilary’s affection for him was more than friendly, and it seemed difficult to him to explain that he could not marry yet awhile. To begin by saying so would be fatuous. To say so, if she accepted him, might lead to awkward explanations. He might vaguely talk of business reverses—but he felt sure she would not accept him. Had she not refused him explicitly not so many weeks ago? Perhaps if Dick had still been in a position to marry this day, or the next, he would have tried his luck again. But as this was impossible, he reasoned that he had better not run the risk of a second rebuff. To-day he must let her wander from

him. Perhaps time would bring her back, and in a different frame of mind.

They returned to the house together, and found plenty to do for the next two hours. It was depressing work to stroll through the stripped, disordered rooms, and imagine what they would look like three days hence, in the hands of an auctioneer. Hilary opened the piano, and played a Prelude of Chopin's that her father had asked for sometimes. Then she knelt down in front of a long dwarf bookcase full of old friends she must leave behind. There were the pink-covered "Waverleys" that had belonged to her grandfather. It was very hard to let them go. The *Master of Ravenswood* would look at her with unrecognizing eyes from newer pages. She could not make friends with a paper-backed *Cœur de Lion*, or thrill for any other *Amy* than the one she had always known. And here was the nice old edition of Shakspeare. Where else would she find *Hamlet* and *Beatrice* and *Romeo*? Between these dull gray boards she had found them years ago; and now, with everything else in her old home, they were to be taken from her.

When it was nearly time to start she went into her own room to put on her traveling things. This last hour seemed interminable. It would be a relief when the cab came and carried them away. Everything she looked at here, everything she did, gave her pain, and she knew that for her mother the wrench must be more grievous still. Mrs. Frere came in ready dressed while Hilary was pinning on her hat and veil. She had followed one of her children everywhere all through the day. She sat down now and looked about her.

"I thought you would go away from this room as a bride," she said sadly.

In her own mind she pictured the events of the day she had so greatly wished to see. She beheld Hilary in this very room on her marriage morning, in her marriage robe. She saw the shimmer of satin, and the misty veil, and the wax-like orange flowers;

she saw her later in her traveling gown, pelted with rice by the wedding crowd, taken from her mother's arms by one nearer and dearer still; she saw her father smile and Nell shed a few tears while she herself did both. She saw her there to-day, in deep mourning, her father dead, her home in ruins, with no bridegroom at her side, going forth this instant on her mother's helpless arm to suffer privation, to depend on charity, to flee from actual want.

"Well, mother," said Hilary, "it is time to go. Is Nell ready?"

"Poor Nell!" said Mrs. Frere.

The worst moment was not, as Hilary had expected, the one of going away. On all sides there were matters that required attention and diverted their thoughts. The dreaded moment had come and gone before they had time to reflect that it was there. Dick hurried them into the cab, rushed back for a forgotten trunk, took charge of keys, gave final orders, and drove off with them to Charing Cross. The London streets looked hideously stale and dusty. Perhaps there would be trees and rivers in the foreign land.

But as Dick stood on the platform, and watched the train steam out of the station, he wished he could fetch his friends back. To what were the three women going? how many dreary hours awaited them? into whose clutches might they not stray? How could creatures incapable of earning money, and having none to spend, ever shift for themselves? They needed a man's support as distinctly as a child needs the care of a grown-up person. Why had he let them go?

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

WHEN you are young, a journey through a foreign country can hardly fail to entertain you. At any rate, your eyes and ears are busy, and that, if you are out of spirits, is in itself a tonic. Hilary did not sleep much while she traveled, but she looked out of the window. When the dawn broke they were speeding through a Flemish country wrapped in a golden haze, tranquil and strange. The grass was dripping with dew, the cattle stood knee-deep in reedy ponds, leaves fluttered singly and silently from the autumn trees. No men and women were astir yet in the comfortable-looking homesteads. Hilary felt sorry when the train carried them into a wide-awake world again where everyone was busy. The morning hours between Brussels and Cologne were more tiring than the night had been; and when at last the Freres reached the old cathedral town, they were glad to rest there for half a day before going on. But at night, when they resumed their journey, Hilary reflected that their halt had cost them dear. Every bookstall, every shop-window, every pedler hawking local wares held bait for Mrs. Frere. What she saw she wanted, like a badly brought-up child, and Nell abetted her. They came back to the station refreshment room with their hands full of photographs and eau de cologne; they had spent a considerable sum on seeing the hidden treasures of the Dom; and they proceeded to order a meal that cost at least a week's income. Hilary stared at the stars while her mother and sister slept, and she wondered what they would do when their money was all gone. As she understood their

affairs, they owned nothing in the world but their household furniture and one thousand pounds, which would be paid about three months hence by the insurance office. The furniture was to be sold, and the proceeds would belong to Mrs. Frere, to squander in a week, if she saw fit. She had agreed to leave the money in Mr. Harrison's hands provisionally, and to write for small sums as she needed them. Hilary felt convinced that her mother's applications would be frequent. The insurance money was to be held in trust for Nell and herself until they married or attained the age of twenty-five; and from this source they could reckon on an income of forty pounds a year. Nothing had been forthcoming from the business. Mr. Frere's claims on the year's profits ceased the day he died. Mr. Theodore had paid his late partner's private bills, and explained, through Mr. Harrison, that even this was more than he need have done. Hilary reckoned that the bills amounted to about two hundred pounds. For their traveling expenses they had been obliged to sell the household silver.

Mr. Theodore often said of himself that he was not a philanthropist, and as far as his partner's widow was concerned he made good his words with all the pleasure in life. He did not rob her, but he kept hold of every penny he might by any legal stretch call his. He could trust Mr. Harrison to bluster if Mrs. Frere asked tiresome, addle-headed questions. Mr. Harrison had a most valuable manner; he could suggest jail with a grunt, and penal servitude with a frown, to a woman as timorous and ignorant as Mrs. Frere. He did, in fact, tell the silly lady that the bed she slept on might be taken from her if she showed the least distrust of Mr. Theodore, and after that she held her tongue.

Hilary sometimes wondered why a thousand pounds had been left to them. Suppose it had been claimed for a business debt? what could they have said or done? They could not fight two hard-headed busi-

ness men. It was most unfortunate that their father had not committed their interests to other hands ; but his will had been made many years ago, when Mr. Theodore first came to the office ; he had narrowed and hardened since then. The two partners had drifted further and further apart. Everything had altered except the half-forgotten legal document that, after lying so many years in a cupboard, had suddenly become of paramount importance.

It grew colder as they traveled northward, and toward morning a fine rain began to fall. When, at an early hour, they arrived in Hamburg, they felt tired and chilly. At the station no one came forward to meet them, and, after claiming their luggage, they set out for the distant suburb where Frau Lange lived. It was a dreary drive along an interminable road. They passed between lines of inferior shops and of tall, dull houses built in flats. Further on there were spaces not yet covered—mere sandy deserts given up to fair booths at stated intervals throughout the year, but empty now, and as ugly as Wormwood Scrubbs. The working population was astir already, and proved more interesting to the English ladies than the landscape, the women and children were so plainly dressed, so tidily shod. There were servants on their way to market, bare-headed, wearing clean cotton gowns, and carrying large baskets in which to bring back the provisions of the day ; there were soldiers on the march to their barracks ; the cab drivers and the tramcar conductors wore smart uniforms, and looked like government officials ; the postmen walked as if they had been drilled.

After driving at a snail's pace for nearly an hour, the Freres found themselves in the main street of a little suburban town. The cab soon turned off into a quieter road that led to a whole colony of detached villas, varying in shape, in size, and in the amount of garden belonging to each. The driver stopped at one of these. The girls looked eagerly out, and their first impression was a pleasant one. They had expected

something worse. The house stood in the midst of a small garden, decorated with large colored glass balls, cheap plaster casts, and a few flowers. It looked clean, and new, and roomy, and as ornate as if a confectioner had designed it. The varnish on the little balconies glistened in the sunshine ; the paint on the outside shutters was as green as grass ; the French windows were all closed. More than this they had not time to observe, because, as the cab stopped, the front door opened, and their aunt appeared on the threshold.

Mrs. Frere ran impulsively forward and imprinted a warm kiss on her cheek. Hilary and Nell held themselves ready to do likewise in a somewhat cooler fashion. Frau Lange's appearance gave her nieces a severe shock. It was far less promising than her house. She looked outlandish, unrefined, and bad-tempered. She had come back from Peru thin and sallow. Five years of her native food and climate had changed her into a stout, florid woman. She still wore her back hair in grotesquely elaborate coils, while on either side of her face it was frizzed over pads. Her little black eyes were much smaller in her filled out face than they had been in her hollow-cheeked one. The lines about her mouth—those lines we all make for ourselves from day to day—said little for her self-control or for her good-humor. She wore an uncouth plaid dressing gown, shabby slippers, and several fine diamond rings. She received her sister-in-law so impassively, she seemed so much less interested in her nieces than in the cab-driver, that the girls thought they might escape without exchanging kisses. They offered to shake hands, but their offer was not observed, and they passed beyond their aunt into the house. A moment later Frau Lange had plunged into a lively altercation with the cab-driver. Her impassive manner gave way to one of active indignation. She would *not* allow him to carry the trunks upstairs unless he first took off his boots.

"Why did you bring so many?" she said suddenly to Mrs. Frere. "It's absurd. When I travel I take one portmanteau."

"But we have brought all we possess. We have left nothing at home," replied Mrs. Frere, with an apologetic face.

Frau Lange shrugged her shoulders.

"You will find it very expensive, if you travel much," she said. "Do you want any of them taken into your bedroom?"

"We should like to have them all there," said Nell.

By this time a slovenly looking maid-servant had arrived on the scene, and prepared to help in carrying the luggage upstairs. Frau Lange watched the process so intently that she probably made the poor creature nervous; at any rate, the corner of a large trunk was allowed to bump against the wall at an awkward turn of the staircase. In a moment the mistress of the house had darted forward, her tongue unloosed, her hands trembling with anger, as she pointed to the dent made in the wall paper.

The girl, she informed her wondering relatives, was the wickedest slut in Germany. None of the many bad servants who had helped to wear out her nerves approached this particular Auguste in thievishness and incompetence. That very morning she had broken one of the best eggcups. Mrs. Frere had better lock up her clothes. Twelve plums were missing from the fruit provided for a tart at to-day's dinner! Frau Lange had counted them herself the night before. There would not be enough to go round now. But the girl was capable of anything. She was treated like a princess, and yet she had the impudence to grumble because she could not have butter for breakfast. Her mistress never dreamed of eating butter for breakfast, but that made no difference. In these wicked times servants expected luxuries their superiors could not afford for themselves. Why had Nell sat down on the staircase? She was in the way there. In Germany people sat

on chairs. If the cabman saw her he would think she was out of her mind.

"We have been traveling for two nights," explained Mrs. Frere. "We are very tired."

"I have not slept well either," said Frau Lange. "One may rest as little in bed as on a journey. I am often kept awake by vexation since Auguste has been in my house. However, we had better come upstairs now. I must take care that they do not scratch the paint on the floors."

The Freres followed their hostess to the second story, where they were shown the bedroom allotted to them, and a barely furnished sitting room opening out of it, in which they would all take their meals. The first floor was occupied by the "best" sitting room and by Frau Lange's bedroom. On the ground floor there were only household offices and kitchens. The arrangement seemed curious and inconvenient to the newcomers.

"You get your one servant to carry all the meals to the top of the house!" said Mrs. Frere incautiously.

Her sister-in-law went on the war-path again directly. The two girls strolled away from her into the bedroom and looked more closely at their new sleeping quarters. They saw three very short, narrow, wooden bedsteads, on each of which lay a large square pillow in a linen pillow-case, trimmed with lace, and marked in the middle with an enormous embroidered monogram. Two of the bedsteads had bright green eider-downs, and the third, a more old-fashioned *plumeau* as high as a well-shaken feather bed, and covered with checked muslin. There was one linen sheet on each mattress, but there were no top sheets, and no blankets. For their clothes, they saw a huge wooden cupboard; for their ablutions, one small washstand; for their vanity, a miserable little mirror hung facing the light. There were two chairs, lace curtains, and no carpet. Presently Mrs. Frere came in, and found her daughters disconsolately sitting on

the floor in front of open trunks. They had only found rows of pegs in the cupboard, and did not know where to put their things away.

"I had forgotten some of the details of German life," said Mrs. Frere, going straight to the washstand. "There is not a quart of water here. Your aunt seemed quite surprised that I wanted any at all. She said that Auguste would not like to put the washstand in order more than once a day. I am afraid she is rather peculiar. I wonder who she was. My brother picked her up in Peru, and I have never heard that she has anyone respectable belonging to her. She says she does not know the Werners. I dare say they will not wish to come and see us here. However, we can go to them."

"Really, mamma," said Nell, "why did you come and live here?"

"What else were we to do? It was very kind of her to ask us, you know. Besides, German life is so easy and comfortable."

That was Mrs. Frere's formula. Meanwhile, none of the ladies had ever accomplished a toilet under such difficulties. When they felt a little less dusty and disheveled they went into the adjoining room, where they found the midday breakfast awaiting them. It consisted of coffee, eggs, rolls and butter, and it was served in thick white earthenware, placed, without any attempt at precision, on a gray linen cloth. The girls liked it well enough.

"What time do you have dinner?" inquired Mrs. Frere.

"When it is cooked," said her sister-in-law.

"But have you no fixed time?"

"The fixed time is four, but, of course, if the dishes are not ready, we can't eat them raw."

Frau Lange's voice sounded slightly stormy again, as she answered her sister-in-law's second question. The two girls looked at her in bewilderment. How would it be possible to live with anyone who took offense at everything and nothing? The prospect

appalled them already. By way of changing the subject, Hilary got up from table and looked out of the window at the gardens behind the house.

"Yours ends with that wall, I suppose," she said to her aunt. "Whose is the big one beyond?"

"Herr Hansen's," said Frau Lange, and turning to her sister-in-law she added, "Hansen, Bopp & Rössler."

"*Our* Herr Hansen!" cried Mrs. Frere. "O Hilary!"

"What?" said Frau Lange.

"We know Herr Hansen very well," explained Mrs. Frere. "He came to us a great deal when he was in London. I did not know he had a house out here."

"A great many rich people live here. It is considered very healthy."

"Do you know Herr Hansen?" asked Nell.

"Of course I know him. He is my landlord. Sometimes he comes in the evening, and we make music together."

"Oh! do you play?" said Hilary with interest.

"No. I listen."

"Does he know we are here?" inquired Mrs. Frere.

"I have not told him. I never thought that you would really come. When I got your letter I could not believe it. Every day I expected you to write and say you had changed your mind. Until yesterday I did not get your room ready."

"But you seemed so anxious to have us," said Mrs. Frere, rather taken aback.

"Yes, one writes like that. One has a sheet of paper to fill, and it is so difficult to compose a letter of consolation. After all, we must die, too, some day. Why make such a fuss? However, we shall try, now that you are here, to live together. You can always go back to England if you do not like it."

The girls were nearly asleep all this time, and they scandalized their aunt a good deal by saying that they would now go to bed for a few hours. She had

never heard of such a thing. Bed in the daytime ! Young girls ought not to know what fatigue meant. It showed the kind of life they had led in London, if, at their age, they were so feeble. What would they do when they came to be fifty ?

"This is very exhausting," said Nell, as she lay down on one of the three little bedsteads. "Does she live in a red-hot rage ?"

"She has had a sunstroke, you know," said Mrs. Frere, who had followed her daughters.

"I wonder what she was like before it," said Hilary.

The three weary women slept for several hours, half roused once or twice by the slam of a door, or by the sound of Frau Lange's voice in altercation with Auguste. Their hostess was evidently having a lively afternoon, and at six o'clock, without any ceremony, she dashed into their room in a state of wild excitement.

"I cannot help it," she began. "You see that I am hot and tired, do you not ? I have stood over the fire ever since breakfast, and yet it is not ready. Can you believe that I cut all the beans myself ?"

"What is the matter ?" said Mrs. Frere, only half awake, and quite alarmed.

"The vegetables are not cooked. It is six o'clock, and at seven Herr Hansen will come and try my new piano. He has sent in a note to say so."

"Can't we dine without the vegetables ?" asked Hilary.

"Oh ! if you will. There is plenty of cold veal ; but then you will write to all your English friends and say you are starved in Germany."

But somehow, by the time dinner appeared, the vegetables were cooked, and formed the main part of the meal. They were stewed with vinegar and sugar, and Nell did not like them. This deeply offended her aunt, who said she could not afford to send to London for a cook. If her niece would not put up with burgherly German fare, what was to be done ? Perhaps Nell objected to raw herrings and

raw ham? two everyday Hamburg dishes. Nell was discreet enough not to betray, just then, that she would rather go hungry than touch either of them.

After dinner Frau Lange led her guests downstairs to the "best" sitting room. She got rather excited when she opened the door and found that Auguste had lighted the lamps without special permission; but in her anxiety to display the glories of this apartment, which evidently contained the treasures of her heart, Auguste's misconduct for once went unproved.

There was first a good-sized airy room, with three large double doors, occupying a considerable portion of the wall space. One of these was always set open, and it led into a second smaller room on the south side of the house. The walls and ceilings were covered with paper imitating panels of various costly woods; the floors were parqueted; the furniture, all made to match and of a florid design in mahogany, was upholstered with bright magenta reps. In each room there was a sofa against a wall, and an oval table right in front of it. On both tables there were a few illustrated books in ornamental bindings. In each room there was a white porcelain stove, and four straight, narrow windows in a row, blocked by imitation india-rubber plants and palms. There was a small piece of carpet at the foot of either sofa, and half a dozen cheap engravings in shiny black frames on the walls. The vases were in pairs, white, pink, or blue, and painted with flowers that in this world do not bloom together. Frau Lange's guests thought everything collected there looked tawdry, comfortless, and antiquated. They did not know what to say when she pointed out each separate attraction, like a guide in a museum, and asked them whether they would ever have guessed that her paneling and her palms were both made of paper. She invited Mrs. Frere to sit beside her on the sofa in the larger of the two rooms. The two girls were about to draw forward chairs for themselves, but Frau Lange got into

a fluster at once, and explained that in her house each chair had its place, and must not be moved an inch. She would not like Herr Hansen to arrive and find the room in disarray. So Hilary and Nell sat down with their backs close to a wall, and listened while their mother fell to talking to her sister-in-law of their troubles. This seemed to have the effect of an opiate on their aunt. She began to nod.

The two girls, directly they thought it safe, got up and slipped out of the room. They did not enjoy sitting still on straight-backed chairs, with nothing to do and nothing to say, like children in disgrace. They went back to the dining room on the top floor. The lamp had been extinguished here, but the full moon shone in at the window.

"Shall we walk round the garden?" said Nell, looking out. "It is quite light and warm. I long for some fresh air."

Hilary saw no possible objection, so they fetched their cloaks and went out. They soon arrived at the end of the little garden, which even by moonlight looked untidily kept. They saw a few fruit trees on the patch of long coarse grass, and in the borders, flowers, weeds, and kitchen vegetables growing side by side. They were puzzled, at first, by a sound that seemed to come from a distance, and made itself heard above all other sounds of the still autumn night.

"It must be frogs," said Hilary, on reflection. "There is a marsh or pond somewhere near, and it is full of frogs."

"Let us look for it," said Nell. "Here is a door that probably leads out into a road."

They had come to a low door built in the wall at the end of the garden. Nell tried to open it, but it stuck, and did not move until she pushed against it with her whole weight, then it suddenly flew forward; if she had not clung to the handle, she would have been thrown to the ground. As it was, she escaped with a grazed elbow and a precipitate lurch into Herr Hansen's garden. He stood there, staring at her and

at Hilary, as if he expected them to behave like apparitions, and vanish without speaking.

"I forgot your garden might be behind the door," said Nell breathlessly, as soon as she had picked herself up. "We wanted to find the frogs."

"Miss Hilary! Miss Nell!" cried the astonished man. "It is really you! In Hamburg! In Frau Lange's garden! Do you know her, then?"

"She is our aunt by marriage," explained Hilary, holding out her hand. "We have come to live with her. Didn't she tell you?"

"She told me she expected friends from England, but she did not mention their name," said Herr Hansen. He did not add that when he last saw Frau Lange she had bemoaned the arrival of three pauper relatives, and at the same time asked him to reduce the rent and put in a new kitchen boiler. He looked at the sisters with interest and compassion. He knew that they had lost their father, and were very poor.

"But when you were in London did none of us mention Frau Lange?" asked Hilary.

"No."

It was not wonderful. The girls had almost forgotten her existence until her invitation came, and Mrs. Frere never imagined that her brother's widow would be known to anyone of Herr Hansen's standing.

"And she never spoke of us to you, although she knew you came to London?"

"I hardly see Frau Lange twice a year," said Herr Hansen. "Last week I met her in the wood near here, and she asked me to come and tell her whether she has given too much money for her new piano. Before that I had not seen her since Christmas."

"She expects you this evening," observed Nell, looking at his costume. Herr Hansen wore a gray alpaca coat, light trousers, a red silk tie, and a Panama hat. "I am on my way there now," he said placidly. "I little thought of meeting you. It is a great pleasure. I hope that you like living in Germany."

The girls explained that they had only arrived that morning, and had been asleep all the afternoon. They had not yet tasted German life to the dregs. As he accompanied them up their own path, they asked him whether in Germany gardens always communicated with each other, and he assured them that it was quite exceptional. The door they found was one made, many years ago, for the convenience of his grandmother, who used to live in Frau Lange's house. No one troubled to lock it, and no one ever opened it. Herr Hansen hoped that the young ladies would sometimes walk in his garden now and gather his flowers. He was hardly ever there himself. He preferred Hamburg all through the autumn and winter. Nell said that they would some day pursue their search for the frogs. She held up her hand as she spoke, and asked for silence. They all stood still near the house and listened to the chorus of a thousand voices croaking to the night.

"I wish storks came to Hamburg," said Hilary dreamily. "My picture of Germany is made up of storks and of old tumble-down roofs with windows in them like eyes, and of narrow streets with cobblestones and gutters. It is a shock to find these gimcrack villas here."

They went back into the house and upstairs, where they found the two ladies still sitting together in a dozy condition. But Frau Lange roused at the sight of Herr Hansen coming into the room behind her nieces. She did not look at all pleased when she heard how they had already met outside the house. She seemed to think it rather improper of the girls to have gone into the garden by themselves, and she reminded them, with emphasis, that they were not in England.

Herr Hansen behaved in the most cordial way to Mrs. Frere. He expressed great pleasure at seeing her in Hamburg, and fell into a conversation about various Hamburg families formerly known to her, people he still counted among his friends. He told her of their shifting fortunes—of those who had been

taken, and of those who were left. He said that she must be sure and call on her old friend, Frau Werner, who had several charming daughters and a hospitable house. He inquired after several of the people he had met at Mrs. Frere's dinner table, and, in short, put questions and made suggestions indicative of genuine regard. Frau Lange listened with ill-humor, and made various attempts to divert her guest's attention. At last she got up, threw back the lid of her cottage piano, and invited him to play.

Herr Hansen rose heavily from his chair, put down his Panama hat, and went to the piano. He struck a few preliminary chords, and then said to Hilary, "What shall it be? Beethoven? Schumann?"

Frau Lange was standing at his elbow, and she answered in her niece's stead.

"Play what you please, Herr Hansen," she said. "We know nothing of music ourselves. We shall enjoy whatever you choose to give us."

"Your nieces know a good deal about music," he observed dryly, and he started with some numbers from Schumann's "Carnival." He chose those Hilary used to ask for over and over again at home. He ended with the "Davidsbündler" march. Then he turned to Nell:

"Will you not sing?" he asked.

"But what do you think of my piano?" said Frau Lange hastily. "I consider that it has a fine tone. Of course, it is not a concert grand, but we are not all millionaires."

Herr Hansen's fingers wandered lightly over the keys, and he looked ruefully aside at a distant wall. Even the march had sounded thin and wooden on that trumpety instrument.

"It is a handsome case," he said at last. "That is a new way of fixing the candlesticks, I believe. Very ingenious. I have not seen it before. Yes. This man must be doing a good business. His pianos are advertised everywhere. Will you not sing something, Miss Nell?"

"English music is trash," said Frau Lange abruptly. "How can you ask for it, Herr Hansen? Continue to play to us, I beg."

Herr Hansen, instead of complying with his hostess' entreaty, rose from the piano and went back to his seat near Mrs. Frere. Nell had naturally made no sign in response to an invitation on which her aunt threw such exceedingly cold water. Frau Lange began a promenade from one end of the room to the other, and her nieces saw, with alarm, that her face had turned crimson again.

"I hate the English," she snapped out suddenly. Hilary and Nell looked at each other: "Wherever they go they make themselves ridiculous."

"Anyway, they manage to go far," said Nell.

"That has always been their policy. They are so selfish and greedy. When I travel I avoid an Englishman as I avoid a mad dog. The sight of their clothes is enough. No one likes them, their manners are so bad."

"Germans often confuse Americans and English," said Mrs. Frere, in a peacemaking voice. Her sister-in-law turned on her viciously.

"On the contrary, when we see people behaving well we know they are American. As to Englishwomen, all they can do is to read novels and play 'croquet,' while their households go to rack and ruin. I thank Heaven I have no son; he might want to marry one and break my heart!"

The girls could not help smiling at this unnecessary burst of gratitude. Herr Hansen muttered something intended as a sedative. He looked very uncomfortable, and not at all pleased. He did not mind finding fault with the English cuisine in a company of flourishing English people uncommonly well-satisfied with themselves, but he would have died rather than say anything disparaging of their country to these unhappy, home-sick women.

The arrival of Auguste with a supper tray made an agreeable break in a conversation that was becoming

somewhat strained. The supper consisted of microscopic sandwiches and slender bottles of Pilsener beer. Everyone gathered round the table to partake of it, but an apparently insurmountable difficulty arose at once. Hilary and Nell did not drink beer. They asked for water instead. Herr Hansen said that Hamburg water was not particularly good. Frau Lange contradicted him. She had never heard a word said against it before, and she drank it unfiltered every day, and considered it incomparably better than any water to be got in London.

"Besides," she went on, "in my opinion beer is more wholesome and proper for a young girl than hot brandy and water." The girls stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"No Englishwoman would dream of going to bed without a glass of hot brandy and water."

"Where *have* you studied our customs, Aunt Bertha?" said Hilary, laughing. "You did not see us drinking brandy and water when you were in London."

"My sister was governess in England for years. She knows English society thoroughly. All the ladies there drink spirits at night. It is the climate. My sister did it, too."

"I dare say," said Hilary politely, "but I assure you it is not an universal custom. I have never seen it done."

"My sister lived ten years in England. Every night the spirits were brought up, and the whole family drank them with hot water and sugar and lemons. I have never met anyone who knew England as well as my sister."

Hilary and Nell looked at each other. Mrs. Frere sighed. Herr Hansen said good-night.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AFTERNOON CALL.

THE early breakfast, consisting of coffee and small rolls, was served at eight o'clock. Hilary and Nell liked it better than the other meals, which came at haphazard times, and were often uneatable—that is, they liked it as long as they were allowed fresh rolls. But they were hungry every morning and ate a good many, so their aunt soon hit on the expedient of providing stale ones. It was a brilliant idea. Without butter the girls hardly managed one apiece.

The second breakfast was eaten at midday. At this meal Frau Lange and her guests shared two hard-boiled eggs, minced small, and a good-sized pot of weak tea. The girls used to get uncomfortably hungry before dinner time. Frau Lange said Englishwomen were even greedier than her sister had described them. On Sundays there was always a joint of roast beef for dinner. Hilary and Nell quite looked forward to Sundays, but their aunt carved, and she had to be careful, or the joint would not have lasted long enough. She never bought more than one joint in seven days. Toward the end of the week strange messes were dished up at dinner time. Coarse soups made of beer, or milk, or common fruit; cheap vegetables smothered in sugar and vinegar; salads mixed with raw herrings; great slabs of tasteless curd; stirabout not unlike English porridge—a plentiful supply, in short, of what the girls and their mother could hardly eat, while the plain roast meat for which they hungered was always lacking. At first the sisters treated the diet as a joke; ate what they could, went empty now and then,

foraged for themselves as long as they had a penny in their purses ; but even while they made merry they grew thin and colorless. It wrung their mother's heart to see the roses vanish and the hollows in their cheeks become deeper.

"I am home-sick for an English leg of mutton," said Nell one morning, when they were waiting for their aunt to come in to the second breakfast.

"Don't talk of one," said Hilary. "You'll make me cry."

The table was spread, as usual, with a soiled cloth, a black japanned bread-basket full of stale rolls, a small pat of butter, and thick white cups and plates. Presently Frau Lange appeared, still in her dressing gown and the morning-cap that covered her unbrushed hair. She was followed by Auguste, carrying the tea and the dish of minced egg.

"Eggs are getting very dear," she said, when Auguste had departed. "They are a halfpenny each."

"We should call that very cheap in England," said Mrs. Frere.

You would not expect that remark to be a signal for a storm, but it was. Frau Lange burst into a lengthy defense of her housekeeping, accompanied by many allusions to the high current prices and the expense of supporting three hungry guests.

"I wish you would let us pay for our board, Bertha," said Mrs. Frere. "I did not like to suggest it when you invited us——"

"How you harp on that invitation !" interrupted Frau Lange. "*I* don't call it good manners to tie persons down to their words in that way. Of course, if you have an impulsive, generous heart you have to pay for it. I have often found that out. I cannot be cold, and hard, and calculating as you are in England. I wish I could."

"You should take example by us, Aunt Bertha," said Nell.

Her mother sent her a warning glance, and said

again that she would be glad to pay their own expenses. Her sister-in-law must fix on a sum.

"You don't suppose I want to make a profit on you?" shrieked Frau Lange. "You have no idea how expensive everything is in Hamburg, and how Auguste takes advantage of your being here. She is so dreadfully extravagant. Yesterday I had to buy pepper again, and she says your piece of soap is used up directly, and then there is the blacking for your boots. We use the best blacking."

"There's nothing mean about me," said Nell, *sotto voce*.

"It is not only the food, you see," continued her aunt; "and if you think I am a rich woman you are quite mistaken. I am very good-hearted, and when you said you were without a home I offered you one directly, but you cannot expect me to ruin myself on your behalf."

You may imagine that the Freres did not enjoy this kind of discussion. Mrs. Frere immediately arranged to pay her sister-in-law a weekly sum that would sound small in English ears, but which, judged by the German standard, was not insufficient. They ought to have had good plain food for it, but Frau Lange's niggardly ways grew worse instead of better as time went on. The spirit of the man who reduced his horse to the last straw evidently inspired her. She could never stint and save quite enough, and when her guests thought they had reached the limits of her parsimony she would still spring some fresh surprise on them. As the severe cold of a German winter overtook them they began to suffer a good deal. Of course, they often considered the possibility of bidding their hostess good-by; but the lack of ready money, the greater price of any other establishment, chained them where they were. If it was nasty, it was cheap; and with their pockets empty, they were driven to make cheapness paramount.

What Hilary felt most of all was the want of some corner that she could call her own. The Greek play

got on very slowly. With her aunt's squabbles in her ears she could not weigh words and turn phrases. The upstairs sitting room was always noisy and close, and when she fled to the bedroom her mother would fidget in and out with that disregard for a young person's wishes so often shown by elderly people. She liked Hilary's company, and she had no belief in her ambitions. Besides, when winter really came, it distressed Mrs. Frere to see the child poring over books, with a fur cloak on her shoulders and the temperature two degrees below freezing point.

"You have been in three times since breakfast, and it is only one o'clock now," said Hilary, one bitterly cold November day.

"Really, Hilary, I must be allowed to come into my own bedroom. I need not disturb you. Just let me get to that table behind your chair. I want the white darning cotton. Why do you load up the table with books in this way? We did not buy it for that purpose. You can't want six books at once. I should think that a person who read with any system would finish one book before she began another. I know I was taught to do so. I see you have two dictionaries open. How can anyone want to find a word in two dictionaries? Dear me, Hilary, look at the thermometer! You will kill yourself, if you stay here. Why don't you take *one* of your books into the sitting room and read there? I am sure no one would speak to you if you asked them not to."

"I cannot read there, mamma," said Hilary. "You talk to me, and Aunt Bertha scolds, and Nell plays scales."

"Well, my dear, I don't know why you should shut yourself up with your books. It gives your aunt such a bad opinion of you. She thinks you are so idle, you know. Nell has embroidered a table-cloth since she came, but what have you done? I believe Bertha would be glad if you both helped more in the house; she gives hints to that effect. She says that when she was a girl she did all the ironing, and she has just

brought in an immense heap of house linen. Some of it is only rags, and she declares that it must all be mended. I have offered to help, but fine darning tries my eyes, especially at night when that horrid flickering lamp is lighted."

"I cannot darn," said Hilary. "If I tried, Aunt Bertha would probably throw it at me, as she did the burned cake at Auguste the other day."

"I wonder if there is anything you can do," said Mrs. Frere reflectively, and without a suspicion that her words might give pain. "Your education was very expensive, but it doesn't seem to have been much use."

"Just what I say to myself every day," answered Hilary, with some bitterness. "I might get a place as governess in England, but you don't like to hear of that."

"Let us go into Hamburg this afternoon and pay some calls," said Mrs. Frere. "There are several people I have not looked up yet."

She always turned the subject as quickly as possible when Hilary spoke of separating from her and going back to England. She knew how home-sick the girls were, but she clung to their company. She could not have faced the empty, joyless days without them.

In spite of what Mrs. Frere had said to Mrs. Theodore, she had expected to step straight back into her old surroundings, but, of course, the disappointments that a wiser woman would have foreseen awaited her. The elders she remembered with affection had journeyed on; she heard of her contemporaries living with children and grandchildren in distant towns; to the young folks she was hardly a name. According to the German custom it fell on her, as the newcomer, to take the initiative—to seek out those who were likely to receive her with a welcome. They were few and far between, and in some cases the girls thought the welcome hardly came off successfully. After a decorous interval her visits were returned, and there

communication seemed to stop. Mrs. Frere was hurt and astonished. How many sons and daughters of Hamburg had she not hospitably entertained beneath her husband's roof? It took months to convince her that such benefits are easily forgot. In reality, her experience was one common to people without much knowledge of character. Those of whom she deserved and expected most held back, while the two or three people who showed her kindness, she had hardly reckoned in her list of persons likely to befriend them. Herr Hansen she could not judge yet. He had been obliged to leave Hamburg on a business journey soon after their arrival, and he was still away. Frau Lange seemed to know no one, although she had been living in her present home for five years. Her complete isolation on the outskirts of that big, crowded city was most striking. No one ever called; she had no visits to pay; no man, woman, or child ever broke bread within her doors. This state of things was, of course, partly her own fault. In the neighborhood she passed for a semi-lunatic of miserly habits and violent temper. No one sought her acquaintance. In Hamburg itself she had never crossed a private threshold. Her lonely social position was a source of much discontent, and yet she took no sensible steps to better it. She railed at the wicked world; she resented imaginary slights; she hated several persons who were hardly conscious of her existence, but these very common manifestations of an evil temper did nothing to mend matters. She had expected Mrs. Frere's friends to hold out their hands to her, but they did not do so. Most of them only had a finger to spare for Mrs. Frere. Hamburg society is provincially exclusive. It does not like foreigners; it shakes its head at artists; on actors it turns its substantial back. What it likes is solid, well-to-do, long-established business men. Its aristocracy is mercantile, and you will find that your most distinguished friends there are on visiting terms with the leading shopkeepers and their wives. It is the center of the world,

and only condescends to follow even Paris fashions at a distance, and with modifications of its own. It considers Paris frivolous, London dreary, and Berlin impertinent. Hamburg is never uneasy about itself. It is never on the alert, like a French or an English provincial town, lest any ill-bred person should allude to its geographical position in the provinces. Its conceit of itself is immense, and in some degree justifiable. It really is a pleasant town ; and the most respected artists there are the cooks.

The modern part of Hamburg is built round the basin of the Alster, a large, bright lake, one of the chief highroads for passenger traffic. Little steamboats ply to and fro all day, and in summer they are crowded. From their decks you see the front of Hamburg, row upon row of large new white houses, very handsome, very expensive, very dull. The most flourishing shops and the well-to-do private houses face the water ; but here and there in the great city you may still find tumble-down picturesque old shanties, survivals from the great fire of 1842. Some still surround the market places, some topple toward the canals, some shut in lanes so narrow that you may lean out of an upper floor window and kiss your opposite neighbor at hers. The poorer folk herd under these gabled roofs and at the docks to westward, while far down the Elbe, toward the sea, Hamburg's merchant princes have set their pleasure houses amid splendid gardens and English-looking parks.

Mrs. Frere and Hilary were going to call, for the first time, on the Frau Werner of whom Herr Hansen had spoken, and who had received Dick Lorimer so hospitably. The Werners lived on the Jungfernstieg, where shops, hotels, and private houses stand side by side. It is the Piccadilly of Hamburg, and only wealthy men can afford to live there ; but the Werners were very wealthy. They had just returned to Hamburg for the winter, after an autumn spent in Switzerland and Italy. Frau Werner and Mrs. Frere were

old friends, but they had neither met nor corresponded of late years.

"I have not seen Anna since she was married," said Mrs. Frere as she went upstairs to her friend's flat, which was on the first floor.

In spite of this reminder, Hilary received a slight shock when she followed her mother into the room. The picture she had formed from Mrs. Frere's reminiscences was of a young apple-cheeked girl always in the highest spirits, and ready for any fun. A short, stout, gray-haired matron got up to meet them, with a stiff courtesy and a look of surprise. It was not until Mrs. Frere spoke that her manner began to thaw.

"Helena Lange!" she cried, addressing her old acquaintance by her maiden name. "You have altered so that I did not know you; but I suppose you can say that to me, too?"

Mrs. Frere thought in her own mind that her friend was, if anything, less well preserved than she was herself; but then, she reflected, Anna had always been plain and had never known it. Anna used to be likeable but tiresome, because all her geese were swans, and they formed her only topic of conversation. Mrs. Frere soon had an opportunity of discovering that, in this respect, her friend had not altered much. At first Frau Werner surveyed her guests with inquiring, friendly eyes, took their measure as well as she could, and asked them a good many questions about their recent history and their motives for coming to Hamburg. She did not ask questions that were difficult to answer. Her interest in them was quite genuine and friendly, but it takes both time and knowledge to bridge the gap made by thirty years.

"You have two daughters, Helena, only two? I have five—all beautiful. Heaven has blessed me in my children. I must show you the photograph they had taken secretly for my last birthday. It is only my children who have such delightful ideas. Here it is—the five daughters, the three sons, the two sons-in-law, and the grandchildren. That is one son-in-

law. He is the handsomest man in Hamburg, excepting my husband. That is the other. He is the cleverest doctor in the town. Two of my daughters are still at school, but Olga is only a little younger than you, my dear Hilary. Do you sing? Olga has the most wonderful soprano voice. Perhaps you can sing duets with her?"

"I have no voice," confessed Hilary.

"What a pity! Perhaps you are very domestic. In that case you must know my Martha, who was married this summer. I miss her terribly. She knew every dinner napkin in my possession, and I have a hundred dozen; and she did all the mending. Some day I will show you the dusters she darned last winter. It is like lace, so fine. She has had to wear spectacles ever since, poor child. You must bring both your daughters next time, Helena. Will you join our family dinner next Sunday? then you will see us all except Kurt, who is at Tübingen. We sit down twenty ever week, because the grandchildren come, and Fritz Hansen when he is in Hamburg. You know him? When he came back from London, this spring, he told us he had been often at your house."

While Hilary listened she looked about her. She was glad to correct her idea of German family life by a peep at a home so unlike the sordid one in which she lived. The windows in this room faced the Alster, and the fine, well-cared-for palms that grew in front of them were not made of paper. Close to some of the windows were seats, and in the most comfortable corner, near the light, stood Frau Werner's work-table and her special chair. She could put down her embroidery and look straight out across the great lake at the sailing-boats in summer, at the skaters in winter, at the twinkling, distant lights every evening after dark. The furniture and decorations of the room were in no way artistic, but everything was solid, comfortable, and well kept. The inevitable sofa, with the table right in front of it, occupied the largest space of wall; an ugly carpet of good quality covered

the floor ; none of the knickknacks was tawdry ; the engravings were valuable. In a little room, only separated from this one by a half-drawn portière, Hilary got a glimpse of a superb landscape in oils. Of course, these people had money, but their home did not proclaim that fact at all loudly. This room, at any rate, was rather quaint and old-fashioned. It reminded Hilary of German pictures, in which all the furniture looks heavy and out of date ; but she could fancy that an orderly, flourishing family had spent year upon year here.

"Your daughters must be very fond of fancy-work," said Mrs. Frere, looking at the endless specimens of elaborate embroidery everywhere on view.

"They all excel in it," said Frau Werner proudly. "See, on my last birthday, they gave me these." She pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket, made of fine linen, but which the English girl, with her scrap of cambric, thought big enough for a towel and thick enough for a sheet. In one corner there was a large elaborate monogram.

"The four elder ones each did three," continued Frau Werner. "Can you embroider? But why should I ask? Undoubtedly you can."

"No," said Hilary, "I don't care much for fancy-work."

"But, my dear child," exclaimed Frau Werner, evidently scandalized, "what do you do all day?"

"Hilary reads Greek," said Mrs. Frere.

"What good does that do her?" inquired Frau Werner. Perhaps she saw that she had asked a question not very easily answered ; at any rate, she went on rather hurriedly to another subject.

"So you have really given up your house in London! That surprises me. Well, we both have daughters, and you know what I mean—one has wishes for them. Hitherto my hopes have been singularly blessed. Emma's husband we met at Norderney. The first time I saw him I said to myself, 'Such a one could I wish for a son-in-law,' and

before we left they were engaged. A very respectable old-established firm, you know. With the boys I am in no hurry, but a girl should marry before she is twenty. Martha's marriage was also a sudden affair. None of my children has ever given me a moment's uneasiness. This summer, it is true, my little Olga lost her heart; but it may still come right, and I notice that she eats her dinner as usual. If it is not that one, it will be another. We are all in the hands of Providence."

Hilary looked out of the window. It was snowing slightly, and getting rapidly dark. In a minute or so they must leave this well-warmed room, trudge through the half-frozen slush to a tramcar, and drive back in the cold to Aunt Bertha's miserable dinner-table. She wished Frau Werner would give them a cup of tea; but Mrs. Frere got up now, and said that it was impossible for them to wait until Olga came back; they must get home in good time and they would look forward to seeing all Frau Werner's children on Sunday at five o'clock.

Directly they got downstairs Mrs. Frere complained of being both cold and hungry. She said that before going on they would get a cup of coffee at a confectioner's shop on the Neuer Wall, already well known to them. Hilary was nothing loath, although the cost of it weighed on her mind; but she generally felt half starved nowadays, and the idea of a dainty little meal tempted her sorely. There would be nothing tempting ready for them at home, and the minced eggs served for the midday breakfast had been as highly flavored as a glass of Harrogate water. The ladies had only eaten a little stale bread and butter.

If you think a first-rate Hamburg confectioner fills his windows with muffins and raspberry puffs you stand in need of wider views. A foreign confectioner sells cakes that tempt people to eat them. One cannot imagine anyone over the age of twelve buying British buns and tartlets with any expectation of enjoyment. In a Hamburg shop, if you are not hun-

gry, you thank Heaven you are greedy, and fall to. Mrs. Frere and Hilary ordered coffee and Mandel-torte, an ambrosial cake filled up with cream, that tastes of nuts and is colored like heliotrope ; but Mrs. Frere looked preoccupied.

"I wonder what Fritz Werner is like," she said reflectively. "He must be thirty."

"He was in that photograph," said Hilary. "A little fat man with mutton-chop whiskers and potato nose. Frau Werner pointed him out. She said, 'This is my Fritz. He is considered very distinguished-looking.'"

"I am rather sorry I said anything about your knowing Greek. I have been in England so long I have quite forgotten the German point of view. I am afraid Ahna may think it must affect your house-keeping, and, of course, in a sense she would be right. You never darned my dusters so that the holes looked like lace."

"I should think not."

"I dare say Martha Werner would have been quite pleased to mend all that linen for Aunt Bertha. I hope Nell has sat down to it this afternoon. Do you think she can put in a patch so that no one can see it?"

Hilary said she thought it more likely that a garment in which Nell had put a patch would be recognized a mile away. Neither her sister nor she had ever been taught these fine devices. They had never attempted to darn a stocking until they came to Germany, and they had not yet managed even that successfully.

"It is very hard," said Mrs. Frere. "In England people want girls to be pretty, and well-dressed, and healthy."

Hilary understood the implication underlying her mother's plaint. It is very trying to bring your daughters well up to the standard of one marriage market, and then have them thrust into a foreign one, where quite a different set of qualities is in demand.

"You ought to have some lessons in cooking and darning," continued Mrs. Frere. "I wonder what they would cost?"

Hilary's attention was just then diverted by the sound of a voice well known to her, and she turned her head to see Herr Hansen buying bonbons at the counter. As she did so he looked her way, recognized her, and came up to their little table. He had only just come back from St. Petersburg, he said. The Werners expected him to dinner next Sunday, and he could not appear there after a journey without bonbons for his godchild, their youngest girl. He hoped Mrs. Frere and her daughters were well. Had they come to town altogether, or were they still staying with Frau Lange? Where was Miss Nell?

"She could not spare the time to come," said Mrs. Frere, "she was so busy darning linen for her aunt."

Herr Hansen looked rather surprised.

"That does not sound like Miss Nell," he said.

"My daughters are very domestic," replied Mrs. Frere. "We do not talk about it quite so much as you do in Germany. In England we think it rather absurd to make a fuss of what must be done as a matter of course. We were just saying how interesting it would be to have lessons here in cooking and sewing. Then the girls could judge for themselves which style was superior."

"You must not make us out more accomplished than we are," said Hilary.

"That would be difficult," said Herr Hansen.

Mrs. Frere looked delighted.

"When are you coming to see us again, Herr Hansen?" she said.

He hesitated.

"You are still with Frau Lange?" he observed, and then, without answering Mrs. Frere's question more definitely, he put his bag of bonbons into Hilary's lap.

"I will send them to the young lady who is at home darning," he said, lifted his hat, shook hands

cordially, and edged away to the counter, where he bought a second supply of bonbons before leaving the shop.

When Mrs. Frere and her daughter reached home they went straight to their own bedroom. There they found Nell wrapped in eider-downs, and reading a novel.

"Well, my dear, what have you been doing all the afternoon?" said Mrs. Frere.

"Oh! Aunt Bertha asked me to help her mend that house linen."

"I told you so," said Mrs. Frere triumphantly to her elder daughter. "Look at that great bag of bonbons, Nell. Someone sent them to you because you stayed at home to help your aunt."

"Who sent them?" asked Nell quickly. "They are very good ones," she added, as she dipped into the bag.

"It was Herr Hansen," said Hilary, who knew her sister would look disappointed when she heard this name instead of the one forever uppermost in her mind. "How much darning did you do, Nell?"

"One pillow-slip."

"Really, good darning takes a long time," said Mrs. Frere. "Was Aunt Bertha pleased?"

"She threw it at my head, and yelled at me. What would you darn a linen pillow-slip with, mamma?"

"Fine linen thread, of course."

"I did it with crochet cotton. She says it will take her all the evening to unpick. She wouldn't trust me with it again."

"I felt sure we were taking those bonbons on false pretenses," said Hilary, with her hand in the bag.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FAMILY PARTY.

THE girls did not know how to dress for the dinner on Sunday, and their mother's advice only bewildered them. She said that when she was a girl no one wore a low-necked gown except at a ball, but that even in Hamburg customs changed. She would advise them to wear their best white summer frocks, only she knew the Werners would be shocked if they appeared in anything but black. Germans were most particular about mourning. They laughed at the English custom of putting it on for second cousins twice removed, and they did not wear as much crape as those elderly females to be met in any London omnibus, but they would think very little of a girl who doffed her black merino before her father had been dead a year.

"Must it literally be merino?" asked Nell. "If it must, we cannot go at all. The only black gowns we possess are these serges we wear every day and the lace ones we had made in the spring."

"They are cut low, and have no sleeves," objected Hilary, for in those days sleeves in evening gowns had been temporarily abolished.

"I am sure you need not be ashamed of your neck and arms," said her mother.

"But we want to dress suitably," said Hilary. "Don't you think Aunt Bertha would know?"

"Certainly not. She is not in Hamburg society."

"Then she probably knows all about it," said Nell. "Isn't there a penny society paper here? We might afford a penny if we could find out how the senators' wives dress when they eat each other's Kalbsbraten."

Don't they tell you anywhere here that Frau Bummelhausen looked very handsome in an exclusive gown of carrot-colored brocade?"

"No, they don't," said Mrs. Frere with a sigh, as if, even in this, she found Hamburg a little behind the times.

Hilary reminded her mother that if they must wear black they must choose between the serge gowns and the lace ones. Nell said that settled it. She was not going to face twenty people with a patched sleeve.

Mrs. Frere felt divided between her desire to see the girls in evening frocks again and her doubts of such raiment being correct on this occasion. But when they were dressed they looked so charming that she would not, for the world, have altered a ribbon end. Only, as they put on their hats and long warm cloaks, she said nervously, "I hope it is all right. What will you do if every other woman in the room has on a high stuff gown?"

"Oh! we shall bear it for once, and know better next time," said Nell.

Mrs. Frere felt that her children did not take the present hour quite as seriously as it deserved. She had told them a great deal about the Werners and their important social position, but Hilary had hardly listened, and Nell had wondered whether all the men would tuck their napkins into their waistcoats and eat with their knives like Herr Hansen. In imitation of that well-bred prince who poured his tea into the saucer when his guest did, she had even gone so far as to practice eating with her knife; but she found that it was not a habit to be adopted at a moment's notice. It was more difficult to manage than a fork.

When they arrived at the Werners' flat they were not taken to a dressing room, but merely assisted to hang their cloaks on a hat-stand close to the outside door. They were then shown into the sitting room they had seen when they called. The lamps were lighted now, and the twenty family guests assembled. Even before the door shut behind them, while they

walked toward their hostess, Mrs. Frere and her daughters saw that the low-necked, sleeveless gowns were wrong, hopelessly wrong. Frau Werner wore a plain short winter walking dress of some woolen material, a large gold brooch, linen collar, cuffs, and two gold bracelets, broad enough for a waist-band. All the other ladies present were dressed in the same style, and the men wore tight black frock-coats, fancy trousers, and colored ties. Perhaps the two English girls were unjust, but they both protested afterward that two foreigners who came to an English dinner in morning dress would not have been stared at as they were all the evening. If they had worn tar and feathers the company could hardly have looked more surprised. Directly the first buzz of greeting and introduction was over Mrs. Frere, who had been led to a place of honor beside her hostess on the sofa, said in a tone of apology, "In England, you know, we dress like that every evening."

"Hamburg is not England," said Frau Werner. "We have our own ways."

Mrs. Frere was just going to explain that in thirty years of exile her memory of Hamburg ways had grown rusty, but before she could speak Frau Werner had risen to greet another guest. Herr Hansen came in, and was received by everyone with enthusiasm. Hilary could not help reflecting, as she watched his progress through the room, that fate had funnily turned the tables. To-day she felt ridiculously dressed, unknown, stumbling in speech, and of little consequence, while Herr Hansen's clothes looked like other people's, his language was the common one, his presence regarded as an honor, his manner easy and natural.

When dinner was announced everyone went in anyhow, the elders first, the young ones in their train. Mrs. Frere was invited to take a seat near Herr Werner, a good-humored little man, with a figure that had not been improved by fifty-six years of fat living. On his other side sat his wife. The older and more important

guests all found places at the upper end of the table, while the young daughters of the house, the grandchildren, and their nursery governesses sat at the bottom, nearer to the door. Hilary found herself between Olga Werner, the unmarried daughter of eighteen, and a young man, who was introduced as Herr Kapp, and described as the brother of Frau Werner's eldest son-in-law.

The room was long and narrow, like the dining room in a Swiss hotel. It contained no furniture but a narrow table, chairs, and a side-board, on which Hilary saw three brass coffee machines, as bright as if they had been bought yesterday. The table linen was very fine, and embroidered with huge monograms; the silver was all real and massive. Everything looked spick and span, and yet, considering that the Werners were wealthy, curiously bare and rough. On that endless length of table the only decoration was one vase of artificial flowers, a large glass dish of apple sauce, and several bottles of hock. Before each guest there was a roll, a napkin folded flat as it had come from the wash, two or three wineglasses, and a knife and fork pitched on the cloth crosswise, without precision. There were two waiting maids present in spotless short-sleeved cotton gowns and white caps. Hilary thought them rather unnecessary at first, for she found that Frau Werner's guests waited mainly on themselves. Herr Werner dispensed the soup, and plates of it were passed along from one to the other. Then a fillet of beef arrived, and when the host had cut the whole of it into slices he put a choice one on Mrs. Frere's plate, a second on his wife's, a third on his own; after that the dish of meat, with accessory dishes of vegetables and salad, wandered step by step right round the table till it arrived, almost empty, at the top again. The maids seemed to do nothing but change the plates, and hand round pickles and preserves at unexpected moments. For instance, when Hilary had just helped herself to the wing of a roast fowl, she saw a tray at her shoulder with several small glass

dishes on it, and the one nearest to her contained a turned-out pot of marmalade.

"But that is English," said Olga Werner in surprise, when her neighbor let it pass.

"Yes," said Hilary, "we eat it for breakfast with toast."

"What a horrible custom," said the girl, and she took a large spoonful and ate it directly she had finished her fowl.

So Hilary learned her lesson. Contempt for any habit that is "foreign" is a game that two can play at. Therefore, when the cheese came round, and after it a sweet rich pudding, she partook of both, and was thankful. Some of her neighbors were rather shocked when they saw her eat cheese, but they were not surprised. Frau Werner had confided to her daughters that she feared Helena's children were "emancipated."

Hilary and Nell both understood German, and they listened with interest to the conversation, which was almost entirely about the food and wine. The women present took no conspicuous share in it. Hilary had expected her neighbor, Herr Kapp, to make some effort to entertain her, but he did nothing of the kind. He ate a Gargantuan dinner, and addressed himself between the courses to Herr Hansen opposite. Once or twice he threw a remark to the young English-woman, as unwise people throw a scrap to a dog who begs from them at table, but when Hilary showed a disposition to enlarge upon what he said he seemed to think her rather importunate, as the unwise people think the dog when he begs for more. He asked Hilary whether she had seen much of Hamburg yet, said it was a pity when she replied that she had not, and immediately plunged into a strife raging just then among the men folk as to who purveyed the best oysters in the city. A little later he asked her whether she often went to the theater, was caught before she could speak by the general excitement about the arrival of some fine old Madeira, and when this flagged, turned back to her and inquired where she usually sat

in the theater. By this time Hilary had averted her head, and was trying to make friends with Olga Werner. She heard Herr Kapp's question, but she did not trouble to answer it. She felt sure he would not listen because Herr Hansen was describing the excellent midday breakfast he had eaten one Sunday in August at Blankenese. No ghost story would have held his audience so enthralled.

Olga Werner was just such a fair-haired, apple-cheeked girl as her mother must have been thirty-five years ago, when Mrs. Frere and she were confirmed on the same day. She had a friendly, healthy young face, but no one except her mother could have called her a beauty. Beside Hilary she looked clumsy in make and gesture, and empty-eyed. She seemed to have no idea of playing hostess by proxy to her foreign guest. When Hilary addressed her she answered amiably, but with as few words as possible. When Hilary let her alone she chattered and giggled to a schoolgirl cousin on her other side. Nell was much better off than her sister. She sat next to Herr Hansen, and stirred him up until he talked to her. She assured him that she had learned to eat with her knife; she asked him when he was coming to play on her aunt's piano again; she thanked him for the bonbons, and confessed, without contrition, that she had not earned them. After dinner she promised to sing, if he would accompany her. Herr Hansen looked quite pleased, and said he hoped that now Nell and her sister were in Germany they would acquire proficiency in those domestic arts that became their sex better than profound learning. He made the whole of this remark without taking breath.

Hilary watched her sister with amusement. Nell could never resist the temptation to charm, and she usually succeeded. Herr Hansen evidently thought her an agreeable young person. When everyone got up from the table and went back to the drawing room he remained at her side. Coffee was served almost immediately, and most of the men present lit cigars.

"The German fashion is more comfortable than yours," said Herr Hansen, helping himself from a box offered by Herr Werner's youngest son. "Here we are all together, and we men may smoke as much as we like."

"Delightful!" said Nell, who had a delicate throat, and knew that ten minutes later she would not be able to sing a note.

"You smile. You do not agree with me."

"I should if I might smoke too," said Nell. "Have you a cigarette?"

The redoubtable Martha, the lady who darned the dusters, heard Nell's question, and felt driven to interfere. She was a solid, phlegmatic looking creature, dressed in black silk.

"If my mother heard you, Fräulein, she would be shocked," she said.

Nell's eyes gleamed with mischief. She had never really attempted to smoke, but she would not admit as much to this solemn young woman.

"Don't you smoke?" she began innocently, but Frau Martha made a gesture of denial that was almost a bounce in her chair. "But you do in Vienna," added Nell.

"I know nothing about Vienna," said Martha stiffly. "When we are not in Hamburg we are in Holstein. We do not vagabond about the world and pick up strange habits. In Hamburg a woman who smokes is not considered respectable."

"It was so in England less than fifty years ago," said Nell. "I never understand why. If it is a pleasant habit, why do we let the men keep it all to themselves?"

Frau Martha's eyes grew rounder and rounder, and she moved slightly, as if, thought Nell, she felt inclined to gather her skirts together and flee from such a neighborhood; but Herr Hansen had listened to this little skirmish with signs of impatience and distress. As soon as he could get in a word, he ingeniously persuaded Nell to confess that neither

her sister nor she smoked, and that it was not usual yet for young girls to do so, even in England. He fully agreed with Frau Martha in her reprobation of the habit—for women, and he looked pleased when Nell made her peace by saying she supposed tobacco, like many other good things, was meant by nature to be monopolized by men. After this the conversation proceeded very smoothly. Herr Hansen was called away by his host to a game of Skat, but Hilary and Olga came near, and perhaps it was Hilary's reputation as a classical scholar that suggested reminiscences of learned and "emancipated" women. Olga, who had been in Switzerland and Italy that autumn, told a traveler's tale of a Russian lady doctor who was suspected of wearing real trousers under her skirts, but neither her married sister nor she grew animated until they heard that Hilary had actually been at a university—like a man. Then they had a great deal to say in condemnation of such a practice. But as they derived their pictures of university life from what they knew of German "corps" students, Hilary naturally had a good deal to say too—in refutation. She assured Frau Martha that the girls at St. Cyprian's did not have beer orgies or dueling bouts, nor did they rampage up and down the university streets in noisy gangs, with wolf hounds at their heels. Frau Martha only half believed her. She said she had lately read an English novel, in which these college girls were shown up as an uncommonly bad lot. Hilary said that no set of people could wholly guard themselves from the tongues of the ignorant and the slanderous, but she thought the foundations of St. Cyprian's were strong enough to resist the attacks made in one or two silly novels; and she took some pains to describe the studious, orderly life of the place, the care taken for the health and comfort of the girls there, and the pleasant comradeship that existed among them.

"I like English people," said Olga Werner.

"Yes, I know you do," said her sister.

Hilary and Nell both felt that a good deal more was implied by these insignificant remarks than met the ear, but they received no further light on them until much later in the evening.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Frere had been invited by her hostess to the small inner room, where the two matrons settled down together for a comfortable chat. No one followed them, and Frau Werner, before taking her seat on the sofa, shut the portières. Mrs. Frere felt rather sorry for this, as it hid her children from view. She liked to see what they were doing, to watch their faces, to compare them, to their great advantage, with everyone else in the world.

"Well, Anna," she said very soon, "what do you think of my girls?"

"They seem very highly educated," replied Frau Werner, with a slight air of evasion that did not escape her friend.

"In London they were considered pretty," she said, with a sigh.

"An artist in our hotel at Nice wished to paint Olga's portrait, but I would not permit it. Would you?"

"It depends," said Mrs. Frere vaguely. "There is an English picture called 'The Golden Stairs,' and Hilary might have sat for one of the girls in it. Have you ever heard of Burne Jones?"

"No. We patronize German artists. My husband is very patriotic. He will not even read an English book. He says we ought to encourage home industries. I will show you the picture behind us afterward. It is by a Düsseldorf man, and considered very fine. I don't care for it myself, because the girl looks melancholy. I like cheerful things about me. Life is so full of real troubles. Besides, her cloak is a red that no one with any taste would wear, but the painting is very well done."

"Have you troubles?" asked Mrs. Frere. "You seem so happy and prosperous—so different from me."

"Providence has done very well for me, on the whole," admitted Frau Werner, in a tone of self-congratulation. "Our children have all lived, and are a constant source of pride and pleasure to us. My husband's work has been blessed from the beginning; but no mother can lie down at night with an easy mind until all her daughters are married. You see there is Olga ready, and Greta coming on."

"I think a great deal about my girls, too," said Mrs. Frere, who heard a note of reproach in Anna's voice.

"It is not enough to think about it. It is a mother's duty to act for her children. I may say, without vanity, that neither of my elder girls would have married their present husbands if I had not made the matches."

"But how do you set about it?" inquired Mrs. Frere.

Frau Werner smiled, and set down her coffee-cup.

"From an old friend I need have no secrets," she replied. "Besides, it has probably occurred to you—you will have observed that we receive Fritz Hansen as one of ourselves."

"But he is a great deal older than Olga," objected Mrs. Frere, as if there had been twenty instead of two years' difference between Olga and her own child.

"I have no objection to that," said Frau Werner.

"But is anything settled? Has he proposed for Olga?"

"No. Last winter Olga was still at school, and since then we have been a great deal away from home. I should not speak of my hopes to anyone but you."

Mrs. Frere could not refrain from saying, "Of course not, in case they fail."

"I have never failed," said Frau Werner. "My daughters are so beautiful, and their father is so generous, the young men run after them. The only difficulty in this case comes from Olga herself. When we were here in July—that young Mr. Lorimer—you

know him, of course—— Well, he came in and out of the house a great deal. I was very busy at the time. The strawberries were ripe and had to be preserved, and our yearly wash was just over. You can imagine what I had to count, and mend, and put away. You have seen twenty-three clean napkins on the table to-day ; that mounts up at the end of a year. And, in some respects, all men are born blind. Her father never told me she had taken a fancy to this young Englishman until two days before he left. I said at once, ‘ If she likes him, and you know that his business is good, let her have him.’ *Des Menschens Wille ist sein Himmelreich.* At the same time, I am not fond of foreigners, and I hope no child of mine will ever live in a country where the mistress of the house is afraid to enter her own kitchen.”

“ But did he propose to her ? ” asked Mrs. Frere again.

“ No,” said Frau Werner. “ I don’t know why he hesitated.”

“ He may be attracted elsewhere,” suggested Mrs. Frere, who wished that she might astonish her friend by telling her that both men had proposed to Hilary and been rejected ; but she felt some delicacy about doing this, and also some doubts as to whether she would be believed.

“ Have you looked at Olga ? ” was Frau Werner’s simple and final reply.

Mrs. Frere’s thoughts wandered sadly to her own dear children.

“ I sometimes wish we had stayed in London,” she said. “ My girls are entirely cut off from their old friends here.”

“ I am always so sorry for girls who lose their position just when they are of an age to marry,” said Frau Werner. “ You must be sorry you did not establish them while you still had the chance.”

“ But they are very young still,” answered Mrs. Frere. “ I have not exactly made up my mind that they will be old maids.”

"I'm sure I wish you good luck with them," said Frau Werner.

Mrs. Frere felt deeply depressed. Her friend seemed to take it for granted that Hilary and Nell were doomed to celibacy by their loss of fortune. She talked as if they were no longer on the lists, as if she did not think of them as possible rivals to Olga; and her tone was matter of fact, devoid of uneasiness or malice. Mrs. Frere could not flatter herself that Frau Werner meant anything but just what she said.

"Hilary would like to find work here," she began, after a pause. "Do you think there is any chance of it?"

"I thought she disliked work, and could not do it."

"I was not thinking of embroidery," said Mrs. Frere.

Frau Werner shook her head.

"No one in Germany wants a girl who cannot make herself useful. My eldest daughter, Anna, tried an Englishwoman for her children, and it was the greatest failure. She wanted a cold bath *every day*, and objected to her bedroom because it had no outside window; and when everyone in the house was ironing or dressmaking she would sit with her arms folded and never offer to help."

"I should not like Hilary to sleep in a room without an outside window," said Mrs. Frere. "A room like that is only fit for boxes or books."

"It is not at all fit for books," said Frau Werner. "My son-in-law tried it for his. They got moldy."

At this point the ladies were interrupted by sounds proceeding from the larger room that were familiar to Mrs. Frere, but not to her hostess.

"It is Nell tuning her banjo," she said. "She thought you would like to hear her sing to it."

Frau Werner did not look much enlightened, but she got up and pulled back the portières, and then Mrs. Frere received some compensation for the bitter moments she had spent since dinner. She saw Nell sitting in the center of the room, the cynosure of all

eyes. Herr Hansen, with the look of an anxious showman, stood just behind the girl's chair, but when she began to sing his expression of anxiety gradually gave way to a well-satisfied smile. He nodded in time, and seemed as proud as if he had pulled the pretty performer out of his pocket. She sang one or two nigger melodies, quaint, lively, tender, and quite unknown to her present audience. Everyone applauded and asked for more.

"It is amusing," said Frau Martha stiffly, "but it is not Beethoven."

"Martha always makes such clever criticisms," whispered Frau Werner fondly to her friend. "She has a very clear head."

The elder ladies had advanced, and now made part of Nell's audience. Mrs. Frere looked about for her other daughter, without success at first, but presently she saw Hilary half-hidden by a window-curtain, near no one, and with her back to the room. When Nell had finished her second song Olga Werner sat down to the piano, and with praiseworthy patience played a sonata of Mozart's from beginning to end. If Herr Hansen had played it, everyone would have listened in delight, but the child had no music in her. Her touch was heavy; her time dragged; she played with effort and without understanding. Her mother and sisters listened in placid contentment. Other people were visibly bored. Mrs. Frere in the middle of the third movement could sit still no longer; she got up and joined Hilary in her window niche. Behind the heavy curtain they could whisper a word or two unheard.

"It is such a pity you don't play or sing," began Mrs. Frere. "Don't you think you could recite a poem or something?"

"What for?"

"Well, to make a good impression. What use is it to stand here and stare across the Alster? That does not show people how intelligent you are."

"I should like to sail about on the Alster all

through a summer day," said the girl dreamily. Her mother's reproaches never vexed or disturbed her. They were made in such good faith, and with such an affectionate air.

"If you had settled in Hamburg, you might have had a sailing boat of your own," said Mrs. Frere.

Hilary's smile was rather a pitiful one in answer to this remark.

"I wish Frau Werner would help me to get some teaching," she said, with a sigh. "I want money for new boots. Did you ask her about it?"

"I mentioned it," said Mrs. Frere; "but don't be in any hurry, Hilary. It will not hurt you to teach a little when the spring comes. In this weather you would only catch cold."

All through the rest of the evening, and on her way home, Mrs. Frere assured herself that she would not say a word to her daughters of Frau Werner's matchmaking plans. It would be a breach of confidence, and, besides, it is not right to speak expressly of such matters to young girls; but as they all three brushed their hair and talked over the events of the day, Mrs. Frere's remarks were so full of sudden halts and palpable evasions that her daughters at last felt invited to take some notice of them.

"Speak up," said Nell; "you know you won't sleep till you have told us. Why will Olga Werner not be able to have English lessons from Hilary after Christmas?"

"She will be too busy," replied Mrs. Frere, in an oracular tone.

"I suppose you mean she is going to be married," said Hilary. "She is much too young."

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Frere. "There must be at least twenty-five years between them."

"Oh!" cried the sisters, with irrepressible laughter, "mamma is mating Herr Hansen again."

"It is not I this time, dears. However——"

"Go on, mamma."

"No, I can't. Let me brush your hair for you,

Hilary. I can't bear to see you tug at it. Olga's hair is very colorless. Does she speak English well?"

"She seems keen about improving in it," said Hilary, "at least, as far as she can be keen about anything."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Frere, "then she will probably get her own way."

"In what?"

"In marriage. It is very strange. If Frau Werner only knew—but, of course, I said nothing, nor shall I do so, whatever happens. We cannot blame either of them."

The girls looked at each other and laughed again.

"Did you know that Dick Lorimer was coming to Hamburg at Christmas?" inquired their mother.

A flash of surprise and alarm passed over Hilary's face.

"What has he to do with Olga Werner?" she asked.

"Oh! Anna prefers a German," said Mrs. Frere.

"At the same time, she says that when a girl's heart speaks, it behooves her parents to listen."

"What extraordinary conversations you elderly matrons seem to have," observed Hilary, looking decidedly provoked. "I suppose Dick's heart would have to speak in this case, and how does Frau Werner know what it would say?"

"She thinks her daughters are irresistible," said Mrs. Frere with a sigh. "Some mothers are quite infatuated about their children."

"I thought all mothers were," said Nell, getting into bed.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE ALSTER.

TOWARD Christmas Mrs. Frere fell ill. Her sister-in-law attributed it to the ridiculous English habit of opening windows in all seasons and at all hours. Even when the doctor looked grave she talked as if Mrs. Frere had a cold in the head that might be cured by violent exercise. It was really influenza with complications. Frau Lange seemed to think herself the chief sufferer, inasmuch as illness gives trouble, however much you neglect the patient. When Hilary had a bad headache she used to hear her aunt scold at the top of her voice over her niece's fussy and malingering ways. Frau Lange resented sickness as a personal affront, an invasion of her privileges. In her own house she liked to monopolize attention.

The girls were soon in despair. The food provided was so poor of its kind, and so badly cooked, that Mrs. Frere could seldom eat it. The cheap, sour wine, sent in because the doctor ordered wine, was less strengthening and refreshing than common beer. As long as they had any money left they brought some small dainties to their mother from outside, but they could not afford to buy what she really needed; and one day, a week before Christmas, the united funds of the family did not amount to five shillings. A little money was still due to them from the sale of their furniture, but Mr. Harrison had that in his keeping, and they could not expect to get it without a troublesome correspondence. Besides, except for their income of forty pounds, they had nothing else to live on through the coming year. Hilary reckoned that it would be just enough to satisfy Aunt Bertha's

demands, and how they were to meet other necessary expenses she did not know. The doctor and the chemist would soon be expecting payment.

"We were so extravagant on our journey and when we first came here," she sighed. "We spent money on cabs and on clothes."

"I wish we had money to spend on clothes now," said Nell. "I can't go out in the snow because all my boots are in holes."

The mother and daughter were in their bedroom, for since Mrs. Frere's illness they had lived in a state of siege. They did everything in the room for themselves, because Frau Lange said she could not allow Auguste to run the risk of infection. At the same time she expected her nieces to appear at meals; as it was, of course, quite out of question to carry trays to and fro for them as well as for their mother. The girls used to find their aunt red in the face and very sulky, sometimes dressed in black silk and diamonds, sometimes in a flowery violet dressing gown. They never knew from one hour to the other whether she would turn up sweet as honey or furious, bedecked or slovenly, nor was it easy to decide which mood and toilet were least pleasing.

"There is none of the wine left that we bought," said Hilary, going to the cupboard and taking out the empty bottle. "You ought to have some with your dinner, and that sour stuff Aunt Bertha gets is no good."

"Auguste told me she got it half price because it is damaged," said Nell. "It tastes of mildew and vinegar."

"There is lentil soup and sausage for dinner," said Hilary, with disconsolate eyes. "Can you eat that?"

Mrs. Frere's eyes were full of tears. She was so weak and ill that she could hardly sit up in the easy-chair lent to her, after much expostulation, by Frau Lange.

"If Henry knew that I was ill and had no money

to buy wine or food!" she thought. "I wish I was with him!"

Hilary guessed from her mother's face something of what was passing through her mind, and she bent down to kiss her. They were disturbed by a knock at the door and the immediate irruption into the room of Frau Lange, very red and angry-looking. She wore the violet dressing-gown, list slippers, and what her nieces called a night-cap. The sight of Hilary and Nell, trim as daisies, at this early hour was in itself enough to excite her wrath. Their spick-and-span appearance was, she often told them, a sign of the idle lives led by English girls. They were not domesticated. They could not cook and sew, they would not scrub, sweep, wash, and iron, so their households went to rack and ruin. The girls often wished they might say straight out that they had never seen in England a household as slovenly and fussy as her own. This morning, without inquiring after her sister-in-law, Frau Lange burst at once into a whirl of words.

"Auguste must clean your room, Helena. Of course, in England rooms are never cleaned. I am a German housewife, and I cannot dress up like a doll when there is work to do."

Hilary knew what her aunt's proposal meant. Auguste would take up the mat near Mrs. Frere's bed, the only bit of carpet in the room; she would then upset a pail of water on the floor, swish about in it with a mop, and come away again, leaving the place as cold and damp as a sepulcher. Mrs. Frere was too weak and ill to move into another room. To chill the atmosphere of this one might be enough to bring on the pneumonia the doctor had with difficulty kept off. Hilary was just going to remonstrate when her aunt, after making a tour of the room, began to speak again:

"You are ruining everything. Look at my beautiful table! there is a round mark on it. You have put an eau de cologne bottle down here."

"I am very sorry, Aunt Bertha," said Hilary. "I

put the bottle down in a hurry the night mother fainted."

"Of course, you can make excuses. A German girl would never do such a thing. She would have been better brought up. How your clothes are lying about! I could look like a fine lady if I did nothing but stare in the glass all day. And you have splashed the wall-paper, and there is my magnificent magenta *plumeau* on the floor, and—*Ach! du lieber, allmächtiger Gott*—the water-jug is cracked—my real English water-jug! No. That is too much. You must pay for it. I shall get out my common crockery for you, and my second-best *plumeau*; and I will not have another fire here this winter, the dirt and smoke are spoiling everything."

"If you forbid the fire to be lighted, I shall ask Dr. Riedel to get mother into a hospital," said Hilary. "I suppose she would be treated with common humanity there."

"Oh, no, Hilary," said Mrs. Frere in a weak voice. "I don't want to leave you and Nell."

"Let us all go away," said Nell. "We should be better in the Elbe than here."

"You take everything so literally," said Frau Lange, who looked quite cowed. Hilary's threat of appealing to the doctor had acted on her rage like a dash of cold water on a flame. She did not want any story to her discredit bruited abroad among neighbors already unkindly aloof. She went out of the room in sulky silence, and a few minutes later Auguste appeared with a basket of wood and a message to say that as the English ladies liked their room dirty they were welcome to keep it so.

Later on in the day Hilary set out to skate on the Alster, which had been frozen for more than a week. Mrs. Frere made a good deal of objection to the expedition. She said that Frau Werner might be sitting at her window and see Hilary on the ice without an escort. A few years ago public opinion in Hamburg had considered skating an improper amusement

for ladies. Frau Werner's elder daughters had never been allowed to learn, but on her last birthday Olga had received a pair of skates. The tide of fashion is truly irresistible. When will the young ladies of Hamburg take to golf?

Hilary promised not to put on her skates in front of Frau Werner's window. In reality, she had other objects in view than an afternoon's exercise. When she arrived at the Jungfernstieg she went straight to Frau Werner's house and rang at her door. The maid said that her mistress was about to drive out, and then Hilary remembered having seen a handsome carriage and pair waiting below, with a coachman in a blue livery and a broad-brimmed, shiny hat. However, she accepted the maid's invitation to enter and wait in the sitting room.

In a few minutes Frau Werner appeared, ready dressed for her drive. Her manner as she welcomed Hilary showed slight surprise, but she signed to the girl to sit down, and asked very cordially after her mother. Hilary explained that her mother had been ill, and was still in a delicate condition. A pause ensued. Hilary tried to summon up courage and broach her real errand, but her heart beat uncomfortably. She had not reckoned on having to speak in a hurry. It was difficult, and would probably be ineffective. Should she wait for a more favorable opportunity? No. If she ran away now, she would feel like a coward when she got home again. She must somehow say what was in her mind.

"Frau Werner," she began haltingly, "I am very anxious to get work."

Frau Werner looked at her doubtfully.

"So your mother told me, my child; but what kind of work can you do?"

"I could teach English. I know French pretty well, and some Greek and Latin."

"Our girls have no use for Greek and Latin," said Frau Werner.

"They learn French and English."

"At school. Some take private lessons too, but for that we have old-established teachers. You might advertise, but I fear you would get no answers."

"I am very anxious to earn some money," said Hilary, with her eyes on the ground.

Frau Werner smoothed her muff and looked unhappy.

"It is very difficult," she said, with a sigh. "You have had no training either to teach or do anything useful. In Germany we expect people to understand the work they undertake."

"But," persisted Hilary, for she had told herself all the way here that she must be persistent, "but in Germany, as well as in other countries, it must often happen that girls who have not been taught to earn a living are suddenly obliged to do so. What do they do?"

"They often go to England," said Frau Werner. "Besides, German girls are not brought up as you have been. They learn everything. My daughters make perfect housekeepers directly they marry, and, besides that, they can paint flowers, and sing, and play, and embroider beautifully, and speak several languages."

Hilary sighed.

"I *must* find something to do," she said. "I am sure I could teach little children. I would take great pains with them."

"Why do you not take a situation in England?"

Hilary explained that her mother did not like the idea of separation from either of her children. Frau Werner pointed out that the career of a private governess would entail separation in any case. She did not believe that Hilary would find an engagement on terms that left her partial freedom. No one she knew employed a daily governess. The system was unknown in Hamburg.

Again there was a pause, and Hilary felt that she had probably outstayed her welcome. No one likes their horses to wait long in a hard frost. She got up,

and she saw by the alacrity with which Frau Werner rose too that she had done so none too soon.

"Good-by, my dear child. If I hear of anything for you, I will let you know. Meanwhile, I hope you will all have a happy Christmas. On New Year's Eve I expect you here, but don't arrive in ball dresses again. These are not Court circles. We are plain burgherly folk, and like to see young girls simple and joyous. I have so much shopping to do for Christmas, I hardly know where to begin. Are you also very busy? Do you embroider in secret for your mother and aunt? Yesterday I saw a light under Olga's door at midnight. I got up to look. This morning she is quite pale and has red eyelids, but I say nothing; when I was a girl I did just the same. Greet your mother for me. I am sorry she was out when I returned her visit. I shall send her a proper invitation for New Year's Eve."

Hilary left the house with a heavy heart. She felt that her mission had failed. This was plainly a world in which butterflies are not easily turned into working bees; at any rate the process proved in her case to be slow and mortifying. Did no one want her? Was there really nothing that she could do? She could not afford a long, unfruitful apprenticeship? What could she set her hand to to-day for which anyone on earth would pay her? In London she had heard of girls going on the stage, though they had nothing to recommend them but youth and good looks. Even to her ignorant eyes such a life bristled with difficulties, and she had seen enough of Hamburg to know that it would be as impossible for her to do it here as to dance at a music hall on a tight rope. Quite as impossible, because she could only expect to act as super or chorus girl at first. In spite of her low spirits, Hilary smiled as she thought of the expression with which Frau Werner and Herr Hansen would hear of such an intention on her part. In her opinion, their disapproval would be justifiable. She shrank fastidiously from the surroundings that would be forced on her

behind the footlights. It would be more agreeable, she thought, to stand behind a counter, and perhaps a little less shocking to her friends. But she felt sure that no one would consent to buy her services for a long time to come. And she could as ill afford time as money. Even a housemaid or a sewing woman had learned a trade. Hilary could not expect to be trusted with cleaning, mending, or making. Besides, she did not look the part. And a cook was an artist; so was a dressmaker; so was a milliner. Alas! she had never followed the arts.

Thousands of people were on the ice. The main stream of skaters passed between an avenue of booths a mile long—booths hurriedly erected for the sale of liquor, rough food, and skates; but this long lane served for a promenade as well as for a rink. Down the middle the skaters glided swiftly—a motley crowd. On either side, where the ice was not swept, those who did not skate could walk in comfort and look on. The whole basin of the Alster was frozen hard and sprinkled with people to-day; some skating by themselves far away toward the cold, pearly mist on the horizon, some right out in the center of the lake, some crossing to the opposite bank. But the shoal streamed past the booths, and Hilary joined it. She skated straight on away from the city, and looked about her. The air and hard exercise roused her, the lively scene entertained her. She wished that Nell had come. Wherever her eyes fell she saw something new and strange. She met a pair of lovers billing and cooing as if the Alster had been a desert; she saw a young man drop his glove, and the young woman with him pick it up; she skated for nearly ten minutes within earshot of two officers, who talked like the lieutenants in the *Fliegende Blätter*. It gave her great pleasure to listen to them. No one molested her, although she looked in vain for other solitary girls of her own age. Many were there in twos and threes, and presently a very unsteady trio came toward her, and nearly tumbled at her feet. She swerved quickly

to avoid a collision, halted at the sound of her name, and then recognized Olga Werner for one of the clumsy three.

"You can skate!" she said to Hilary, in surprise. "I thought there never was ice in England, but only fog."

"There is ice sometimes," said Hilary.

"My sister Martha says that in England there is no ice, and no strawberries, and no nightingales."

"Since I have been in Germany," said Hilary, "I have heard many things about England that I did not know before."

Olga Werner's friends had gone on ahead, and she now looked after them in dismay. She could scarcely stand on her skates, and whenever anyone brushed by her she seized Hilary's arm, and clung tight until the danger was past.

"You have come a long way," said Hilary, wondering how it had been managed. They had met far out on the lake, beyond the booths, and at least two miles from Olga's home; but the girl shook her head.

"I have only just come," she explained. "I have been spending the day with Martha. She lives close by here. Lili and Toni Petersen were there too, and we said we would skate home together; but now they have gone on so fast, I cannot see them. I always tell Martha they are very disagreeable girls; but she will not believe me, because they are her husband's nieces. Do you see them?"

"No," said Hilary; "but I can take care of you. It is time for me to turn back."

"I must not be late either. We dine earlier than usual to-day, because we are going to the theater and it is the 'Götterdämmerung' to-night. That is so long, you know, that they begin half an hour sooner. Mr. Lorimer from England is here. He will sit with us—in our box."

"Dick Lorimer here?" exclaimed Hilary, taken by surprise.

"Yes, but only for one day, on his way to Lübeck,

where he has business. I forgot that you know him."

"He is not skating, then?"

"No. This morning he was busy with my father, and this afternoon he has gone to see some friends. Perhaps it is you he has gone to see."

"Oh! I wonder if he has," cried Hilary, quickening her pace for a moment, and then recognizing the futility of haste at this late hour. Besides, she could not hurry home unless she left Olga in the lurch, and it was impossible to do that. The girl could not have steered her way through a crowd that got more dense and rather rougher as the working-day came to an end.

"He did not tell you he was coming to see us?" she asked, after a little reflection.

"I have not seen him yet," said Olga. "He is at a hotel. My mother sent him an invitation to dinner, but he refused it, because he did not know that he would be back in time. He said in his letter that he might even arrive late in the theater."

The two girls skated on for a time quite silently.

The lights of Hamburg began to gain on the fading light of the winter afternoon. The four steeples came into view again through the cold twilight mist. The gas lamps twinkled in rows all round the Alster, and in irregular points far back behind the windows and the high roofs of the town. The clocks of the four great churches struck the hour, and their chimes rang out across the lake above all the cling-clang made by a brass band and by ten thousand voices. As the twilight deepened men and boys brought flaming torches on the ice, and ran to and fro with them among the skaters, asking for pence; but there was no disorder and no horse play at this hour. The girls did not feel afraid, although Olga said that she had never before-been out so late by herself.

"Well, you are with me now," said Hilary consolingly. "I suppose I am as old as your sister Martha."

"But Martha is married," said Olga, in a voice of solemn remonstrance. She was skating hand in hand with Hilary now, and getting on at a reasonable speed, but her companion had to keep a sharp lookout all the while lest a touch should upset them both. Every now and then Olga swayed dangerously, or came to a sudden, baffling halt. She said that her ankles ached. It was after one of these delays that she astonished Hilary by abruptly speaking of Dick Lorimer again.

"He is so good-looking," she said sentimentally. "He has such beautiful eyes. Have you ever noticed that?"

"I don't see how anyone could help it who was not blind," said Hilary, half annoyed, half amused.

"How long have you known him?"

"Oh! all my life."

"Really! I shall tell him to-night that we have been skating together. He will be interested. Would you rather live in England or in Germany, Miss Frere?"

"In England," said Hilary, with home-sick emphasis.

"I would rather live in Hamburg than anywhere. I should have to be excessively fond of a person to follow him into a foreign country. Do you not agree with me? You would not go off with anyone anywhere?"

"Certainly not," replied Hilary, in whose ears the question sounded superfluous.

"Some girls would," said Olga, with a sage air, "to be married, you know."

"There are your friends," said Hilary. "If you like, we can easily overtake them."

Olga did not look anxious to do so, but she consented to quicken her pace until they joined the two deserters again. Perhaps it occurred to her that Hilary was still a long way from home; but, after all, the four girls went on hand in hand. With support on either side, Olga managed to spin forward merrily, so that Hilary would hardly have gained two minutes by

separating from the rest. She found their chatter out of tune with her own frame of mind. They were full of the coming Christmas, and of the fine presents they were all about to give and receive—especially receive. One girl hoped for a pearl necklace; her sister expected furs, and a new silk gown, and twenty smaller things. Olga Werner said she wanted an opera glass, and a feather fan, and a watch-bracelet, and a muff, and a gold thimble, and several books, and some new music.

"You want a good deal," said one of her companions.

"I shall get all those, and many more," said Olga. "We each make a list, and everyone who gives us presents looks at it. It has to be long—long—long—until in the end one does not know what to write down. Some of my sisters ask for things they do not want much, but I never do that. First, I ask for what I really need, and then I put down books, music, gloves, because those are always useful. What is your plan, Miss Frere?"

Hilary made some evasive answer, and soon after bid good-by. These girls made her feel old and heavy-hearted. As she listened to them she could hardly believe that she had ever been pretty, well dressed, and free from care. If she had seen her hair turn gray, she would have felt that it matched her humor. All the way back, while Olga stumbled at her side, and Olga's friends talked nineteen to the dozen, and the roofs and turrets of the great city came more and more clearly into view, one idea pushed itself uppermost in Hilary's mind. She saw no chance of making money, and by hook or by crook, a little money she must have. The doctor had ordered red wine for Mrs. Frere; he had hinted at champagne; even Rhenish red wine cost half a crown a bottle in these northern regions; and there were other demands to meet before the end of the year. There were new boots to get, for instance. Then Auguste, a capitalist in comparison with the ladies whose boots she blacked,

would expect a handsome tip at Christmas. The tyranny of the festive season presses with greater weight in Germany than in England. Its exigencies had been on Hilary's mind for weeks. Finally, she had resolved to make her appeal for work to Frau Werner; but her hope of success cannot have been very strong, for at the moment of making it she carried in her pocket certain trinkets that in case of failure she meant to try and sell. This ordeal still lay before her, and she shrank from it unspeakably.

How silly! braver and bolder women will say. The trinkets were hers. Why should she hesitate to dispose of them in any way she chose? The question is unanswerable. The truth is, Hilary was rather old-fashioned in some of her opinions, and as unbusiness-like as possible. She did not think it disgraceful, under the circumstances, to sell her rings and her watch, but she wondered how she would ever find courage to enter a shop and propose the bargain. Shops were places where you spend money and meet with civility. If she walked into one, and asked to bring money away, she might find herself treated with rudeness; but even that she had better bear, to such a pass had her fortunes come.

She felt strongly tempted to give up her project for to-day, and hurry home on the chance of seeing Dick. When she got to the Jungfernstieg she stood still and looked back at the skaters for a moment, doubtful what she ought to do. She had stayed on the ice until the dusk came, because she thought her errand would be more comfortably done by dark than by day; but now it was getting unduly late. Ought she to be wandering about the back streets of a foreign town by herself? She had determined that her venture must be made in a back street. All the lamps were lit. Evening had come. It would be grievous to miss Dick. Who knew as well as she that he had eyes?

Hilary turned brusquely, and took a step or two toward the corner whence the tramcars started for her suburb; but the Jungfernstieg is not very broad, and

she could see across the road quite plainly. Suddenly she saw Dick. She made a rush, was balked an instant by a passing carriage, and then saw him disappear into the open doors of a hotel. Perhaps you will call her old-fashioned again, but if he had disappeared down a fiery pit she would have felt it less impossible to follow him. The particular kind of audacity that a girl would need for such an enterprise is not the kind inculcated at St. Cyprian's. She felt sick with vexation and disappointment, but she *could* not go by herself to a foreign hotel and call on a bachelor friend. No one would be more indignant than Dick if she did. He was old-fashioned, too, in some ways.

So there was nothing now to prevent her from trying to sell her treasures; and with the sudden, desperate energy of a person bent on disagreeable business, she plunged helter-skelter into an unknown quarter of the town. It took some time to find a jeweler's shop that looked promising, and at last she stopped in front of one she did not much like; but she felt driven to bring the business to a conclusion. She peeped in at the door, and saw no one behind the counter except a red-haired, unpleasant-looking youth. She felt sure that he would cheat her, but then she carried no lantern to light her to an honest man. She lingered by the window; staring at its contents, screwing up her courage. She had her foot on the door-step, when she heard her name spoken in a tone of extreme surprise, and turning hastily, she beheld Herr Hansen looking at her as if he could not believe his senses. How did she arrive at the threshold of a jeweler's shop in a back slum of the city, late on a winter afternoon?

"You have lost your way?" he said inquiringly. "Let me take you back. Is your mother with Frau Werner?"

"No," said Hilary. "I am by myself."

"This is not a nice part of the town," he objected, "and it is getting late."

Hilary wished he would go his ways.

"I like being out after dark," she said; "the streets are prettier then."

Herr Hansen looked up and down the one they were in as if he felt puzzled to discover what pleased her here. It was dingy, badly lighted, and almost empty; all qualities, if he had only known it, that suited her present purpose.

"I am going into this shop," said Hilary. He looked at it contemptuously.

"It is not a shop for you," he said. "Let me take you to a good one."

"No, thank you. This will do for what I want," she persisted. Herr Hansen saw her face set more firmly. He feared that he had annoyed her.

"Do you know your way home from here?" he asked, as he held out his hand to bid her good-by. She nodded and pointed in the right direction, the one he now took by himself. Hilary watched him turn the corner of the street before she actually entered the shop. The encounter had ruffled her. She felt sure that if Herr Hansen knew her errand he would think it quite disgraceful. His social experiences could never have shown him young ladies reduced to sell their watch and rings. Such things did not happen to the wealthy, respectable folk who were his friends. It had taken many heavy hours to convince Hilary that it must happen to herself.

The unpleasant-looking youth stared more closely at her than at the trinkets she offered for sale; but he took them to the light, made several disparaging remarks about their condition and value, and finally proposed a price. She put out her hand to take the things back. The price he mentioned fell below the meanest estimate she had put on the watch, without the rings. It grieved her to part with any of them, for they were all gifts from her father; but as she took them into her hands she hesitated, and put them down again. She remembered her mother's pale lips, her feeble voice, her want of appetite. At any sacrifice she *must* take back some wine.

"Give me the money," she said, pushing back the things. He did so, and she hurried out of the shop; but she had hardly got beyond its doors when Herr Hansen appeared again.

"There is a fight going on between two drunken men in the next street," he said. "The police will make short work of them directly, but just now there is a nasty crowd. It is not fit for you to pass through it. You would probably get your pocket picked. I will take you back to a decent part of the town by another way."

"Thank you," stammered Hilary. He wondered why her manner was so dazed to-day. As they stood there the youth from the shop came up to them, and without at first taking much notice of Hilary's companion, began to complain, in an unpleasant manner, of the articles she had just sold to him. He wanted half the money back, he said. She had swindled him. The diamonds in her ring were paste, the watch was worn out.

Hilary looked at Herr Hansen, and in spite of her embarrassment she felt glad that he was there.

"I have been selling these things," she said in English. "The diamonds are real, and the watch is a good one. He has given me hardly any money for them?"

"What has he given you?"

Hilary opened her hand and showed him the one piece of gold and the few silver coins she had brought away and not put into her purse yet. Herr Hansen's way of coming to her assistance amused her vastly when she thought it over afterward. He did not ask her what her wishes were, or treat her as if she had any interest in the matter at all. He took possession of the money, marched the young man back to the shop, made him disgorge Hilary's property, and called him a thief in such plain language that the girl wondered how even a cur could stand it. Perhaps the youth recognized a distinguished citizen in Herr Hansen; perhaps the epithets applied to him were not

new in his ears. At any rate, his bluster vanished. He made an abject apology, and Herr Hansen came away with Hilary's trinkets in his hands. Her first thought, when she saw them, was of the wine she wanted. How could she get it without money? But she thanked Herr Hansen with all her heart.

"Do you really wish to sell them?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," said Hilary.

Herr Hansen reflected.

"You had better let me manage it for you, then. It is not a nice thing for a young lady to do for herself, in my opinion, but I suppose you are in a hurry. It is some secret you are preparing for Christmas; some surprise for your mother or sister? I understand."

Hilary hesitated. Should she leave him under a false impression that was creditable, or tell the truth, of which she felt unreasonably ashamed? On the whole, it seemed best to say nothing. She did not want to force their destitution on the notice of a wealthy friend, or call his attention to her own act of self-sacrifice. He could not assist them, and she had no wish to raise herself high in his opinion. If the wish had been there, she would still have felt uncertain. She really did not know what he would think of the truth if he knew it—whether his scorn or compassion would be roused, his friendship or his disapproval. Let him think of her then as able to buy Christmas presents. The illusion could do no one any harm.

Herr Hansen watched her anxiously as she walked beside him, silent and wrapped in thought. Her manner told him more than she knew. He had only a slender belief in the Christmas presents, but he felt pleased with himself for having suggested them.

"I know something about diamonds," he said, as he saw Hilary into the right tramcar. "Those in your ring are good ones. I shall get you a fair price and send the money to-morrow."

Hilary looked at him with a grateful smile. Till to-morrow the wine merchant would assuredly wait for his money.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

WHEN Hilary got home she found that Dick had called, and that no one but the servant had seen him. Her mother had been in bed, and Nell out. Hilary could have cried with disappointment. Why had he not written to announce his visit?

"We are his old friends, and he ought to know that we should be glad to see him," she said. "We are all home-sick. The sight of Dick would have been as welcome as the sight of Dover cliffs is when one gets back again. I wonder whether the porters at Dover station know how pleased their countryfolk always are to see them. Do you think they get more tips than other porters? But what I see when I shut my eyes is the Strand on a winter evening. Everyone is driving to the theater—it is raining a little—the gas is flaring—the streets are blocked by the traffic—the little newspapers boys are screaming out the specials—oh! what would I give to have a fresh pink *Globe* in my hands just now, to know what people are thinking about in London this very hour. And why is there never a fog here, mamma? What is winter without one thick black fog? How I wish we were back, and could have muffins for tea and roast beef for dinner! Why can't we go and live in a cottage in Devonshire? One of our housemaids used to tell me about her home. It had four rooms, and a great barn, and a dear little garden full of fruit and flowers, and the rent was two pounds a year. We could grow our own eggs and bacon there. I would take a situation as governess, and spend the holidays with you. Con-

sider what it would be to live by ourselves again and have no rows!"

"Consider how impossible it is," said Mrs. Frere. "We have no money for traveling, and none for furniture, and at my time of life I cannot begin to live on eggs and bacon, or to scrub my own floors."

"The truth is," said Hilary, "we ought not to be alive at all. Ladies without money are the most helpless, the most unfortunate, the most pitiable creatures in the world. If I could be a cook or a housemaid I could earn a comfortable living, and have the market in my own hands. Every girl who is not to inherit a fortune should either be strangled at birth or taught a trade."

"Of course, I never looked forward to this," responded Mrs. Frere. "I did not expect your father to die, and I did expect Nell and you to marry. It is your own fault that you have not."

Mrs. Frere's tone suggested that she had always done her duty. It was the girls who had failed in theirs. She could never see that she was chiefly responsible for their present position. She had brought up her children to be incapable of any steady effort, unfit for the least privation; and having reared creatures so delicate, useless, and ignorant, she had refused to think of the future, or to sacrifice anything for its provision. But she would, of course, have told you that she had equipped her daughters admirably for the only career in which women can find real happiness. She had given them beauty, health, and charm—qualities as valuable to women as brains and industry are to men. Girls who refuse to gather rosebuds while they may have only themselves to blame when they go empty-handed. If you train a boy to a profession, and he throws away golden opportunities of making his way in it, you condemn him and not yourself. Hilary had refused Herr Hansen. Her mother dwelt on that piece of folly, and not on her own extravagant housekeeping, which she looked back at as a father may look at the money paid to

launch his sons. It is the part of the sons to prove that the investment has been a wise one.

After considerable hesitation Hilary determined not to tell her mother and sister of her meeting with Herr Hansen that afternoon. It was not the family habit to have reservations from each other, but she knew how it would vex Mrs. Frere to hear that her daughter had been seen on such an errand. Hilary could depend on Herr Hansen's silence. She supposed that he would send the money in a registered envelope, so she meant to be on the lookout for the postman until it arrived. That night she wrote to Dick, told him how grieved they all had been to miss him, begged him to come again next day if he had time. When she woke in the morning she wondered, as she opened her eyes, whether he would come. She had addressed her letter to the hotel she had seen him enter. He would get it by the first post if he was staying there.

"I am sure he will not come," she said to her mother and Nell. "He is going to Lübeck to-day on business. Of course, he cannot put that off and get right out here again, just to see us for a few minutes."

Nell watched her sister at the looking-glass. Even if you only possess one old serge gown, you may put it on in a manner that will be full of meaning to another woman. Indeed, before Hilary got to the gown, her sister knew she hoped in her heart that Dick would come. She took unusual pains with her hair. Then she brushed the bodice very carefully, and tried it first without a linen collar, and afterward with one. Finally she put on her best shoes.

But when the post came it brought her disappointment. There was a letter to Mrs. Frere from Dick, in which he expressed great regret at having seen none of them yesterday. He added that he must leave Hamburg at an early hour this morning. Nell saw Hilary look doubtfully at her shoes. Of course, she ought to have put on her old ones now; and if Nell had not been afraid to vex her sister, she would have strongly advised her to do so, on the same principle

that bids you take out an umbrella on a fine day to prevent the rain; but Hilary was not superstitious. After the first breakfast, in spite of Dick's letter, she wrapped herself in a fur cloak, and went down to the first-floor sitting room. From one of its windows she could see anyone entering the front gate. She felt too restless to occupy herself in any ordinary way. Suppose Dick got her letter, put off his journey for a few hours, and came to see them again. She did not want to miss a glimpse of him, and one of the questions it took time to settle was, whether she should watch him cross the front garden and disappear through the hall door, or whether the moment she saw him she should rush down and let him in herself? When she had decided which she would do, she strove hard to convince herself that he could not come at all. He had started for Lübeck long since, and why she was wasting her time at this window she did not know. Of course, she wanted to see him very badly. On this point she did not deceive herself. Her eyes danced, her heart beat as she pictured him walking in. She asked herself what she would feel like if he stayed away and wrote to tell them that he was going to marry Olga Werner, and her involuntary reply told her more than she had bargained for. The idea of Dick married to anyone else had the effect on her spirits that a splash of water has on a red-hot cinder. It put out the glow.

Hilary waited at the window for half the morning, her heart leaping at every little sound, and sinking again when it proved not to be made by Dick's arrival. The strain of expectation exhausted her, and the cold soon chilled her to the bone. When she felt frozen and ready to cry with disappointment she ran upstairs, put on her hat and jacket, and started for a walk. It does not become any girl to have blue cheeks and a red tip to her nose. If she walked in the right direction along the road to Hamburg she could not miss Dick, and the outdoor air would paint her in pleasanter colors than the stale, unheated room had done.

It was a bright, cold day. Hilary walked briskly forward, and felt a different creature in ten minutes, exhilarated by the exercise, cheered by the sunshine, glowing, fresh, and in good spirits. It did not in the least surprise her when she met Dick in a cab about a mile away from home. He jumped out in a great hurry, paid the driver, and a moment later was walking by her side. She had turned back toward home, and he took it as a matter of course that she should do so.

"You said you would be in this morning," he began.

"You said you would be on your way to Lübeck."

"I am going by a later train."

"How unbusinesslike!"

They were walking quickly, and talking hurriedly, and looking at each other with laughing, delighted eyes. The sunshine helped them. It shone on Hilary's hair and made it glitter; it threw their shadows in a pair on the pavement; it turned the hour golden. They were both young, and just now they were together again. Absence and sorrow had taught the girl to value what she had hardly counted a treasure before. She looked out anxiously for any signs that Dick still loved her, and in his manner she saw many. To these she replied. But manner is intangible, and, to a girl who would fain make amends, unsatisfactory. By the time they arrived at Frau Lange's house Hilary wished Dick would speak plainly, that, she, too, might make plain her change of mind. She could not take the initiative. At such moments as these she was hardly in advance of her grandmother. However, when she got to the gate, she hesitated slightly. If they went in now, she must take him to the upstairs sitting room to see her mother; if he proposed to walk on with her instead she would go. She felt loath to enter the house and end the present hour.

"This is where we live," she said, with her hand on the gate. Dick looked at the garden and at the front windows.

"Not bad."

Hilary showed by her expression that she could not agree with him.

"Have you good walks near?"

"Very good," said Hilary. "Woods—I should like to show them to you."

"When I come again in the spring," said Dick, with an eager look, from which she averted her own eyes in a flurry. For at least a minute they stood uncertainly at the gate, acutely conscious of each other, not thinking of what they should do next. Hilary felt almost sure that Dick still loved her, still wished to make her his wife. He was too honest a man to woo a girl in this way, dumbly, and then ride away. But perhaps he felt disinclined to speak a second time; perhaps, being a man, he did not understand that she had changed; men were proverbially dense. She did not know what more she could do to open his eyes. Could he suppose that any other man ever heard her speak with the voice he had heard once or twice this morning?

"Well, shall we go in?" she said. Dick followed her, wondering as he did so what had suddenly depressed her voice and caused the corners of her mouth to droop rather sadly. When this happened, when the first fresh glow of the outer air had faded from her cheeks, he saw that she had grown thin, and that the color he had seen with admiration did not stay.

"You do not look so well as I thought at first," he said, stopping her anxiously at the foot of the second flight of stairs. "Does the life here suit you?"

"Not very well," admitted Hilary. "We all wish we were at home again."

"You never say anything of your aunt in your letters. What is she like?"

"She is rather—vivacious," said Hilary, with a smile that struck Dick as melancholy. She spoke in an undertone, and proceeded hastily upstairs. She did not want an encounter with her aunt on the land-

ing, and she knew that at this time of day Frau Lange was engaged in what she called "housekeeping"—a process requiring, on her part, strong lungs and a vocabulary, and, on the part of Auguste, tears and patience.

Mrs. Frere and Nell were in the upstairs sitting room, and Dick thought he had never seen a more comfortable looking apartment. It smelled of petroleum, had no carpet and no easy-chairs, and was very insufficiently warmed. When he saw the mother and daughters together, he did not know which of the three looked most white and ill. From Mrs. Frere his eyes wandered anxiously to Hilary, and from Hilary to Nell.

"I am very glad to see you, Dick," said Mrs. Frere. "You are the first of our old friends who has been over here. How is everyone in London? Do you ever go past our old house? and have they cut down the white lilac near the gate? I hope not. We planted it ourselves, and some day, when we live in London again, I want to get a cutting. Do you think the new people would give me one?"

"I dare say," said Dick; "but are you coming back to London? Have you had enough of Germany?"

"We have had enough of Germany, but we are not coming back to London," said Nell. She shivered as she spoke, and Dick did not wonder at it. With his greatcoat on he felt cold in this room.

"I wish you would come back," he said.

"I suppose you will soon be over here again?" observed Mrs. Frere. "You will be coming to see the Werners?"

Dick looked rather surprised.

"I don't expect to have business here again until the spring," he said, and then he turned to Hilary and addressed her:

"After Christmas I shall have to go to New York for three months, and I may go to Australia too."

His manner of making this communication raised Hilary's spirits. It pleased her that he should inform

her of his future movements, and take her interest in them for granted; but the spring looked further off than ever, now that she saw it beyond a journey across the Atlantic. The present moment, in which she could really see Dick, speak to him, even touch his hand, was flying fast. Every tick of her aunt's noisy clock made it shorter. Another five minutes, perhaps, and he would get up and bid good-by. She knew of no spell with which she could detain him.

"When you talk of spring, which month do you mean?" she said, speaking out of her thoughts, instead of taking part in the discussion of American scenery started by Mrs. Frere and Nell.

Dick stopped in the midst of something he had begun to say. Hilary's question betrayed, in some degree, what was passing through her mind. She wanted to fix a date for their next meeting. Without conceit he might hope that.

"I expect to be here again in May," he said, "unless I do go to Australia; then I should not get back to London till July."

Hilary made no reply, and her irresponsiveness disappointed him, because he did not understand its reasons. From December to July is a long time to wait for what you would rather have to-day than to-morrow. The clock ticked in her ears and helped to make her dumb. Every click brought the moment nearer when Dick would walk away. Who knew where they would all be eight months hence? To folks whose fortunes are in shreds eight months sounds like a lifetime. Any day a mere gust may tear them quite to pieces.

"You will still be here in May?" said Dick anxiously.

"I don't know," said Hilary; but her mother nodded and blinked at Dick.

"Of course, we shall still be here. Young people are always restless, and the girls would like to go back to London, but we have to study economy now."

Mrs. Frere made the last remark with a triumphant air, as if opportunities for the study of economy had

hitherto been desired but unattainable. Dick's face was rather sad. He had noticed the patch on Nell's sleeve, and the sunshine had shown him that Hilary's gown was shabby. He thought Mrs. Frere looked as if she would hardly outlive the winter, and the girls as if they were poorly warmed and nourished, but he did not know what he could do.

A few minutes later, when he got up to go, Hilary, with a leaden heart, got up too, and said that she would see him to the door; and when they reached the first floor he stopped her.

"Hilary," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "your mother looks ill. Have you money enough to get her what she wants?"

Hilary nodded affirmatively and turned crimson.

"You must let me know," continued Dick, still striving to be composed and businesslike. It cost him a struggle, because, when he found himself alone with Hilary, and on the verge of parting from her, he was beset by a burning desire to take her in his arms. If he had done so he would have made her very happy, after the first shock, but he did not know that. In his effort at self-mastery his manner hardened; he exaggerated the business-like tone, and Hilary shrank from it, repelled and half offended.

"You are very kind, Dick," she said, with her head erect and her cheeks aflame; "but we can get on, and, of course, we cannot take money from you."

Before he could remonstrate she ran lightly downstairs before him, and he followed, vexed with himself and her. As he descended, the sound reached him of a coarse, shrill voice, speaking with unrestrained fury to someone also out of sight. He listened in amazement. If his friends were doomed to live in the same house with a woman who bellowed like a fish-wife, no wonder they looked wretched. He saw now that Hilary was trembling, and had turned crimson. She opened the door and held out her hand, as if she wished to hurry him away; but he lingered, and forgot the ugly, ill-tempered voice.

"You must come back to England," he said, with her hand in his. "You belong there."

For a moment Hilary felt exquisitely happy. The grip of Dick's hand seemed to communicate his own strength and courage, and his voice to make pleasant promises; but before she could speak they were interrupted. Her aunt, with agitating suddenness, bounced out of the kitchen into the front hall, and a pretty figure she was. If Dick had not been there Hilary would have received her with composure, because it cannot be said that her appearance was exactly unusual. All the morning she habitually wore list slippers, ungartered rough gray stockings, the greasy violet wrapper, and a frilled white cap, and while she was "housekeeping" she always wore a scowl and a crimson face. Hilary had become quite accustomed to her aunt's attire, though she still found the scowl and the inflamed cheeks upsetting. But to-day she felt ready to sink into the earth with shame when Frau Lange dashed toward them, a slatternly virago. She had a bowl full of potato parings in her hands, and she was followed by Auguste, who looked as sloppily dressed as her mistress. Dick stared at the pair of them, and then swiftly averted his eyes. Frau Lange, in evident embarrassment, shuffled back toward the kitchen, jogged against Auguste as she did so, and let the bowl in her hands slip to the ground. It fell with a noisy crash—broken in pieces.

"Good-by," murmured Hilary, almost inviting him to go, and as the door closed behind him he heard Frau Lange's voice begin again. From the word or two he made out, he could not doubt that this time she addressed herself to her niece. The vision of her and the sound of her haunted Dick. He knew that there were queer people in the world, but to think of Hilary in the clutches of this slovenly old virago made him most miserable. He left Hamburg in the lowest spirits, for his own difficulties were thick upon him just now. The loss of the two thousand pounds crippled him considerably, and, because troubles never

come singly, one of his largest debtors had become involved in a recent bank failure and could only pay a shilling in the pound. Dick laughed at his own folly when he thought of Hilary, and wished he could have carried her away. A man in his present position had no right to think of marriage. Nevertheless, as he traveled home, he thought of nothing else. He determined to work as hard as he could, and, however poor he was, to try his luck again next spring.

But Hilary did not know anything of his difficulties, and now that he had gone away without speaking she told herself not to imagine that he would ask her again. After his visit the days seemed drearier and longer than they had been before.

Herr Hansen sent her a larger sum of money than she had expected for her watch and rings, and she set two-thirds of it aside for production after Christmas, when the doctor and the chemist would have to be paid; the rest she gladly put in her purse for present use. She spent it on comforts for her mother, and on some necessities for Nell and herself, without explaining where it came from. Mrs. Frere never inquired. She vaguely knew that Hilary had a little pocket money when she left England, and it grieved her to see it spent on food instead of on finery. That it must have been exhausted long ago did not occur to her. She could not apply her mind to this kind of mental arithmetic. To please Hilary she refrained from ordering expensive Christmas presents for her sister-in-law and her children, but she still spent shillings where pence should have sufficed, and allowed a pound to melt with terrifying rapidity. Some natures take pride in thrift, and find the exercise of it bracing and full of interest, but Mrs. Frere hated the need of it as she hated a cold east wind. She would seek any shelter rather than face either.

Hilary was the only one of the three who would have spoken as Loti does of *une pauvreté exquise*; but then, if she had been allowed a free hand, she would have tried to make their poverty exquisite.

In her opinion, the worst difficulties of the situation were created by her mother's inability to accept it. Even their income would have paid for a two-pound cottage and enough porridge and potatoes. Any hardships seemed more desirable than debt, and more honorable than such a life as they were leading now. But it happened to her, as it has happened to so many of us, with the kinsfolk who loved her she felt compelled to sink or swim.

Mrs. Frere still dreamed of marriage for her daughters. With one of them comfortably established, their affairs might even yet go well. Of Arthur Preston they had heard nothing since they left England, and Hilary felt sure that her sister suffered more through his silence than through the discomforts of their aunt's *ménage*. How does one girl know that another is eating her heart out for a man whose name never passes her lips? Partly by this very taboo, partly by the failure of her health and spirits, by her restlessness and by her eyes. Nell's last bad cold had left a persistent cough behind it, that Aunt Bertha seemed to think was artificially kept up for her annoyance.

Even on these winter days Hilary often walked round her aunt's little garden in brooding, inconclusive thought; making impossible plans, cheered by flashes of hope, waking from pleasant dreams to feel the actual day more empty than before. She never took advantage of Herr Hansen's permission to walk in his garden, although at this time of the year he lived in town, so that there was little chance of an encounter with him. She did not go, because Aunt Bertha went so often "on the lookout," as Nell said. Any day Herr Hansen might turn up to see how his plants were faring in the frost, and Hilary could not endure the thought that he should encounter two of them there "on the lookout."

One afternoon, just before Christmas, when they assembled at the dinner table, the girls saw that their aunt was elated, and as they had seen her come back

a little while ago from Herr Hansen's garden, they guessed at once that she had met him there. When she had stood up to ladle out the cabbage soup she sat down again, and said to no one in particular:

"I feel much better to-day."

"I didn't know you were ill," said Nell.

"I dare say not. You only think of yourselves. That is a national characteristic, as I remarked to Herr Hansen this morning."

"What is the matter with you, Aunt Bertha?" asked Hilary.

"Oh, nothing that would interest you. A very obscure and complicated condition of the nerves. That's all. Some people never see you are ill unless you can show them a cut or a bruise."

"That's true," said Nell.

Her aunt stared at her suspiciously, and then continued speaking.

"It is such a relief to talk to a man of refinement and education—a man who gives himself no airs, and yet is really learned and accomplished. I have been telling Herr Hansen what a very poor opinion I have of English schools."

"He must have been amused," observed Nell.

"He was deeply interested. I told him you were neither of you able to knit a stocking, or cook a potato, or mend your own clothes, and that you were not even possessed of any other knowledge as a compensation. When I was a girl, I knew a great deal about chemistry, and mythology, and literature. Of course I have forgotten most of it, but that does not matter in the least. I should have been ashamed, when I was your age, to sit glued to a chair all the evening, and do nothing to entertain my mother's guests. Herr Hansen has promised to spend Christmas Eve with us. It is a great honor. But what can you do to show that you appreciate it? What *can* you do? Sit still with your hands folded, I suppose?"

The girls did not offer any more startling contribution to the evening's entertainment just then, and

their aunt went on to say that their arrogant silence reminded her of Herr Hansen's message. He had met one of their countrywomen in Hamburg, a Mrs. Theodore, and she was coming to see them this afternoon. Who was Mrs. Theodore? and what did she want in Hamburg? Was she related to the Jewish family of that name?

"Her husband is," said Hilary.

"We don't think much of Jews here," said Frau Lange haughtily.

"How mediæval!" cried Nell. "You had better try and impress Mrs. Theodore with a sense of her inferiority."

"Is she Jewish?"

"English. Which is worse, Aunt Bertha?"

"The Jews have *some* good qualities——" began Frau Lange, but how she meant to go on her nieces never knew, because they fled hurriedly from the room to hide their inextinguishable laughter.

The girls had hardly told their mother of Mrs. Theodore's intended visit when Auguste came into the bedroom, to announce her arrival, with her husband. Mrs. Frere was worse than usual that day, and had not got up yet, so the girls went down to the "best" room by themselves. To their amusement, they found their aunt there installed on the sofa next to Mrs. Theodore. Frau Lange looked quite flustered by these elegant, sedate, and supercilious visitors. She was full of apologies for her nieces because they had not appeared directly; and for the room because it was not well warmed. She felt paralyzed by Mrs. Theodore's manner, and overwhelmed by her fine clothes. When Hilary and Nell went in, they found that her color had risen, and that her guests had somehow silenced her. No one was speaking, and the husband and wife were looking round the room with amused contempt. The lamps had been lighted in their honor, and they could see everything plainly—the magenta reps, the imitation bronzes, the oleographs in gaudy frames, the wax flowers. The girls

felt almost sorry for their aunt, and inclined to defend her tawdry treasures; but you cannot easily overthrow an enemy who only attacks with glances.

"We thought we would look you up as we had nothing much to do this afternoon," said Mr. Theodore. "Sorry we shan't see Mrs. Frere. Your aunt says she has a slight cold."

"My mother has been ill for some weeks," said Hilary. "She is in a very delicate state."

"Horrid climate this. Beast of a place altogether. Don't know why anyone lives here. I never know how to put in my time when I come for a week."

"Don't you care for the theater?"

"It isn't open in the afternoon," said Mrs. Theodore, who always seemed to enjoy a conversation chiefly for the chances it offered her of setting other people right. "Besides, we have just come from Paris, and seen good acting."

"But there is good acting here," interposed Frau Lange in a tone of heavy remonstrance.

Mrs. Theodore showed no sign of interest, and was about to speak to Nell when Frau Lange began again, rather more loudly:

"The Hamburg actors are excellent."

"So my friends tell me," said Mrs. Theodore.

"How is Sophia?" asked Hilary, as she saw her aunt's color rise alarmingly.

Mrs. Theodore put down her eyeglasses, through which she had glanced at Frau Lange.

"Sophia is very well," she said.

"And very happy," added her husband, with a faint smile.

His wife looked at him and seemed to hesitate.

"Yes," she said finally, "she is very happy."

"Where is she now?" asked Hilary.

"Probably in a Paris shop," replied Mr. Theodore, glancing at a gilt clock, under a glass shade, that stood on the top shelf of a rickety whatnot.

"She is buying her trousseau in Paris," explained his wife.

"Is she going to be married?" cried Nell, refraining just in time from adding, "at last." "We had not heard of it."

"You are out of the world now," said Mr. Theodore. "You cannot expect to hear things."

"Our best congratulations to Sophia," said Hilary. "Whom is she going to marry? Anyone we know?"

"You know him very well," began Mrs. Theodore; but her husband interrupted her.

"Let them have three guesses," he proposed. "They are sure to hit the right nail on the head."

"My mind is a blank on the subject," said Nell, thinking to herself that she knew no one likely to mate with that clumsy, plain Sophia.

Hilary was watching Mr. Theodore's face for a clue, and the moment her sister spoke she got it. She knew positively what would come next; her hands turned to ice; her heart stood still; she wondered how she could drive Nell out of the room.

"Nell," she began, "do run upstairs. I think I hear mamma's voice."

Nell's brows were bent in cogitation. She hardly noticed what her sister said. She did not stir.

Mr. Theodore let a moment elapse, so that his words should not seem an immediate comment on Hilary's tactics. Then he said pleasantly to her:

"Perhaps you guess?"

"Yes, I do," she said curtly.

A woman cannot hit from the shoulder, as a rule, but if she has honest eyes she can look straight at a man she despises, and make him understand her full opinion. In future Mr. Theodore could not flatter himself that Hilary took him for anything but a sneak.

"You guess?" faltered Nell, glancing from one to the other. She understood from her sister's manner that something was wrong, and her fears fastened with a flash where her wishes centered; but this did not blunt the edge of Mrs. Theodore's next words for her—they seemed to cut her heart in two. She heard them at a great distance, and she felt unable to speak

or move while they forced themselves on her understanding.

"It is Arthur Preston."

Nell heard Mrs. Theodore say that, and then go on saying other things about his devotion to Sophia, and his attentions to her all through the autumn, and his proposal to her at Brighton one November afternoon. But these remarks only entered Nell's ears. They made no impression on her memory, because, all the while, she was saying to herself over and over again, "It is Arthur Preston, it is Arthur Preston," as if she found it a difficult thing to understand or to remember. Finally she said it aloud:

"It is Arthur Preston." Her voice sounded harsh, as if she had not spoken for some time, and she interrupted Mrs. Theodore, who stopped short and looked at the girl with surprise.

"You had better come over for the wedding," said Mr. Theodore.

His wife stared at him, as if she hardly knew whether he was dense or vicious. She had just enough good feeling to be sorry for Nell when she observed how hardly she took Arthur's desertion. No one could fail to see that the girl felt shattered by the news. She had turned as white as death and still seemed dazed. Hilary thought her sister would faint, and, without consulting her aunt, she threw open one of the double windows. A current of icy air blew through the room, and a few snowflakes settled on the floor. Nell shivered and roused herself. Frau Lange rushed to the window, shut it with a bang, and let loose her tongue on the subject of English extravagance. No sooner had a room been heated than her nieces wished to make it cold again. She explained the mechanism of her stove, which only needed filling and lighting once a week, provided the windows, as well as the doors of the room, were kept closely shut night and day. That very day the weekly supply of fresh air had been admitted before the stove was stocked with fuel and set going again.

Of course, in England no one knew what it was to sit in a warm room.

Mrs. Theodore put up her *lorgnon* again, and listened to this tirade without saying a word in reply to it, just as she would have listened to the chatter of an ape, without attempting to join in discussion with him. Perhaps her silence struck Frau Lange as contemptuous; at any rate, she seemed to feel discomfited by it. But presently, when Auguste brought in a tray with liqueurs and cakes, her mistress' tongue began to wag again. Her hospitality in dispensing aniseed biscuits was oppressive; and her nieces knew that she felt bitterly offended because Mr. and Mrs. Theodore refused the treasures of her storeroom.

"We must get back," said Mrs. Theodore at last. "We are going to dine with some people you know to-night—with the Werners. I say to-night, but, of course, I mean at half-past five. Isn't it droll? It takes one back to the last century. I feel as if I ought to wear powder and patches. Stanley says I must wear a high frock. Don't you find that a bore? I hate a high frock at night—and in these stuffy German rooms. We are to meet Herr Hansen. Do you remember him? A stout old party who *will* play Bach's fugues at you."

"Herr Hansen is an intimate friend of mine," said Frau Lange officiously. Mrs. Theodore looked as if she could hardly believe it.

"I hope I shall be spared the fugues to-night," she said, stifling a yawn. "I am sure we shall be stodgy enough without them. Tell Mrs. Frere we are sorry not to have seen her, Hilary. When are you all coming back to London? You and Nell don't look as if German life suited you."

After the fashion of her kind, Mrs. Theodore rustled out of the room without waiting for an answer to her questions. Hilary followed her, but returned as quickly as she could. She found Frau Lange by herself, engaged in extinguishing the lamps and packing away the cakes and the liqueurs. Directly she saw

her niece she began to complain of Mrs. Theodore's insolent behavior. Hilary did not stop to listen. She flew upstairs to her mother's room.

"Where is Nell?" she said, seeing that Mrs. Frere was alone.

"She came in like a whirlwind, picked up her hat and cloak, and went out again," said Mrs. Frere. "What is the matter, Hilary? Don't you go off too. I have been alone for hours to-day. What did the Theodores come for? To bring bad news?"

Hilary looked doubtfully at her mother, uncertain how she would endure the shock, wondering whether she ought to be guarded from it; but this was impossible. Mrs. Frere knew when her children were in trouble. She saw grief and dismay in Hilary's face the moment the girl came into the room. That much insight her love of them made easy.

"What is it, dear?" she said, and the young, unhappy creature could not resist the chance of taking her sorrow to the mother who would share it.

"Arthur Preston is going to marry Sophia Theodore," she said.

The two women looked at each other forlornly. Mrs. Frere had been mending one of Nell's shoes for her; she put it down now, and her blue, tender eyes filled and flowed over with tears.

"My poor child!" she said.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTMAS WITH AUNT BERTHA.

PRESENTLY Nell came back, her clothes powdered with snow, her hair blown about, her face set in pain. She appeared for a moment in the doorway and beckoned to her sister.

"Have you told her?" she whispered, when Hilary came near.

"Yes."

"What does she say? I wish she would not talk about it. I hate to talk about it."

The sisters were standing together in the unlighted passage, and Hilary could not see Nell's face, but her tone was one of extreme nervous exasperation.

"She did not see you come in," said Hilary. "She is lying down. Shall we go into the dining room?"

They moved away together, and went into the pitch-dark, chilly room where, without much stumbling, they found two chairs.

"What does she say?" asked Nell again.

"She cries."

"I don't. I laugh. To think that Sophia and I should run a race, and that Sophia should beat me! I always pitied her."

"I pity her now," said Hilary. "She is going to be married for her money."

"I wish I was," said Nell. "Apparently it is the only thing in the world worth having."

Hilary was silent.

"The disgrace of it!" continued Nell, speaking in the same tone of intense exasperation; "to be jilted, deserted, thrown aside; but why should the disgrace

be mine? How unjust! Everyone will point at me, not at him. They will crowd to his wedding."

"No disgrace falls on you, Nell," said her sister. "No one you need consider will point at you. Besides, we are here—you will neither see nor hear them."

"O Hilary, do you need to be there to see and hear? Don't you know what everyone will say? What a foolish girl I was to get myself talked about—to have let a man who had no intention of marrying me entangle my name with his. How is a girl to guess a man has 'no intentions' when he pursues her? Is she to take every man for a liar? He made me love him. I did not think much about him until I saw that he was in love with me."

"Of course he would make that his excuse. He would say that he did care for you, and that nothing but the want of money prevented your marriage."

"A fine excuse. 'God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man.' But you are right; he did care—I know that. I cared too. Everyone knows that. How intolerable!"

"Is that thought the most intolerable?" said Hilary, half to herself.

"Of course not," rejoined Nell fiercely. "I am trying to tear the other out of my heart. Don't hinder me; help me to hate him, to forget that I want him." Her voice broke, halted, and then turned hard again. "At the present moment he is probably buying carpets with Sophia. How could she consent! It would never have happened if we had not left England. If I could only go back now I might stop it; I might get him back. Why should women sit still and never say a word, while all they care for is filched from them? Why should they not fight?"

"I should not fight for Arthur Preston now that he has behaved like this," said Hilary proudly. "He is a deserter. Don't let him hear you call him. Suppose he should not come?"

"Suppose he should?" said Nell. "Of course it is impossible," she added, after a pause, and without saying anything more she got up wearily and went into the bedroom. Hilary did not follow her for some time. When she rejoined her mother and sister she saw that they had both been crying.

During the next few days Hilary felt really anxious about Nell. The girl seemed to dwindle and pine. Her face did not lose its look of dazed excitement. She watched all day long for something that never came, and Hilary felt sure she cherished a vague, unsettling hope of a message or a letter from Arthur. It was pitiful to see her, and to know that nothing could be done.

Mrs. Frere, after the first shock of surprise and concern, seemed to find consolation in harking back to her old prophecies about Arthur and Sophia. She had always expected Mrs. Theodore to bring this marriage about, she said to Hilary.

"And, after all, he is not the only man in the world. We are here now. Do you think Nell would like to live in Germany?"

"I don't know; but I imagine that no one will invite her to do so; besides, she is very unhappy. You cannot expect her to think of anyone else for years."

"But surely neither of you would refuse a good offer of marriage now that we are in such terrible straits? What would you say of a man who threw up profitable work when his family was starving? It is just the same."

"Oh, no!" said Hilary, "it cannot be."

"Where is the difference?"

"I would gladly work."

"My dear child, in my opinion a woman's vocation is marriage. Those who miss it are failures. No woman would work unless she was driven to it, and when she does she is half starved, because she is a woman and cannot get well paid. The only bearable life for a woman in this world is to depend on a man.

You may talk, and write, and flounder as much as you please, and in the end you will come back to that; because Nature made it so. It isn't her only blunder. Why are we in such a plight? because we have no man belonging to us. And whose business is it to bring men into the family again? I have done my part. I had the best husband, and you the best father, that ever lived. We miss him at every turn."

This kind of talk did not exactly convince Hilary, nor did it encourage her. It chiefly served to remind her of the many instances in which women are hindered rather than helped by men. She thought of able women linked with fools; thrifty women by wastrels; good women broken-hearted for the sake of husbands and sons. She knew that out in the world thousands of women were shifting for themselves; some stumbling and weary, some trudging bravely onward to success, buoyed through their difficulties by the consciousness of work well done. In this army of workers she would gladly have enlisted, had she only known how.

Meanwhile, Christmas was at their doors. In Frau Lange's house the preparations for it were elaborate and economical. The only approach to a feast promised to be the supper on Christmas Eve, when Herr Hansen would be with them. For this meal Frau Lange screwed herself up to an unusual outlay. She admitted to her nieces that he had practically invited himself, to her surprise. She explained to them that Germans like to spend Christmas Eve in the bosom of their families. In her opinion, his action was tantamount to a declaration that he regarded her house as his home.

"But he has two homes of his own," objected Nell.

"A bachelor may have twenty houses, but he can't have a home," retorted Aunt Bertha. "Home means affection, peace, comfort, order. How can a man have those without a wife?"

"I suppose they are not a matter of course with a wife?"

"With a German wife they are," said Aunt Bertha.

On Christmas Eve, after a long day of bustle, noise, and irritation, the Freres descended to the "best" room to wait for the expected guest. Whether everything stood in order yet they did not know. There had been fuss enough to prepare for an army. Even Mrs. Frere had been pressed into her sister-in-law's service, and requested to rub up some plate seldom brought out for use. Hilary had found her feebly trying to do it, and had taken it indignantly away. Her own arm ached with whipping eggs for a cake, but she managed to polish the plate, and with Nell's help to make their own beds and put their own room in order. Auguste could never be spared nowadays to perform any service for them. The girls lived in expectation of being asked to clean out their own stove and black their own boots. They would both have been glad enough to help in a well-managed, well-behaved household, but from Aunt Bertha's kitchen they always came up tired and disgusted. To-day it had been worse than usual, they told Mrs. Frere; for the first time their aunt had stamped her feet and shaken her fists at them as well as at Auguste. Nell had spoiled an egg by failing to separate the white from the yolk. Hilary had not known how to core whole apples. Such good-for-nothing girls had never cumbered the earth. They were sent from the kitchen to dust the "best" room; chivied from there to the upper floor; asked to come down in a hurry and trim the tree; sent out in a snow-storm to buy sixpenny-worth of wax candles; abused in high German and low German because they showed some surprise when they heard that no meal would be served that day at the usual dinner time. Early in the afternoon Nell revolted and went out for a walk by herself. Hilary stayed behind and trimmed the tree. Nothing had been bought for it but the cheapest of sweetmeats, and gilded nuts and apples, but, in Hilary's opinion, that heightened its charm. It looked, when it was finished, like a tree in a picture to a German fairy

tale. If her aunt could have left her alone, she would have enjoyed getting it ready.

Mrs. Frere dressed and went downstairs on Christmas Eve, although she felt hardly well enough to do so. It was the first time she had left her bedroom since the day of Dick's visit. Her daughters hovered about her with extra wraps, in mortal fear of draughts. When they reached the first-floor landing they encountered Frau Lange in her war paint, a black silk skirt trimmed with dabby lace, and a velvet bodice that would hardly contain her. She preceded them into the "best" room, and, as she threw open the door, gave vent to a shout that presaged an uncomfortable quarter of an hour. Auguste had lighted the lamps some time ago, turned them up high, and never looked at them since. Of course they had filled the air with smoke, and poisoned it with the stench of burned petroleum, while a fine black soot had settled on everything in the room. The windows had to be thrown open before anyone could see or breathe there, and then Frau Lange found that the floor, the furniture, the very walls were coated with black dust. Her wrath rose to the occasion. Mrs. Frere fled before it, confused by the noise. The girls helped to set things to rights again. Auguste sat on the floor and howled.

Hilary proposed that they should give up the use of this room for the evening, and sit in the small one opening out of it; but her aunt did not accept the suggestion. The unlighted tree, and all the Christmas presents were there, and it was quite impossible to open the doors until Herr Hansen arrived. When Mrs. Frere came downstairs again she unfortunately made the same proposal.

"What your daughters say matters nothing," explained Frau Lange; "but you are as much a German as I am, and will never be anything else. I agree with the Emperor—people who do not like Germany had better go out of it. What would Herr Hansen think if we lighted our tree before he came? I am sure he would say, 'My dear old friend, Frau Lange,

has lost her manners since those barbarous English arrived.' When he comes we shall sit still, and have a little conversation and a cup of coffee, and when the clock strikes eight we shall celebrate Christmas. In my letter to him I put it in an amusing way—a woman should always write with *esprit*. I said we should have coffee at seven, a Christmas tree at eight, and a roast goose at nine, afterward music. That is my programme, and in my own house I suppose I may keep to it."

While Frau Lange held forth, she paced up and down the room with a duster in her hand, and every now and then she stopped speaking while she removed the soot from a vase, a picture, or an imitation palm. The worst lines in her face showed plainly this evening. She had been too angry to smooth down in a hurry, nor did her heightened color fade away before Herr Hansen came. When he arrived he had a large formal bouquet in his hand, which he presented to his hostess. Auguste followed him with an immense round parcel; this he presented to Mrs. Frere. It contained a cake of Lübeck Marzipan, about eighteen inches in diameter, and piled high with fruit made of the famous almond paste, and colored like life. Frau Lange did not look over pleased. The Marzipan must have cost ten times as much as the flowers. However, she told Herr Hansen that she felt flattered at receiving flowers instead of a costly present, because it showed that he appreciated her delicacy of character. She valued a gift for the giver's sake, and not on account of the coins paid out for it. Herr Hansen would not refuse a cup of coffee. She could assure him she bought her coffee at the best shop in Hamburg.

Herr Hansen took the cup she offered him, and with some difficulty carried it safely to his lips—in the excess of her hospitality she had filled it to overflowing. She had served him first, and then Mrs. Frere. When she had poured out some for her nieces she signed to them to fetch their own cups, but as they

rose she pointed to several plates with little cakes, and asked them why they had not long ago handed these to Herr Hansen. Young girls, she said, should always be prompt and serviceable. The young girls in question took up the cakes and offered them first to their mother. Herr Hansen rose from his chair with the intention of helping himself, but his hostess waved him away.

"Sit down, my dear friend, sit down!" she cried. "Allow my guest to wait on himself when there are two young girls in the room! We have not come to that yet, I am thankful to say. We women still know our place. We are happy to serve men we honor. Allow me to present you with a home-made honey cake, Herr Hansen. I baked them myself, so I know what is in them."

Herr Hansen took a honey cake, but he turned to Mrs. Frere and engaged her in conversation. The girls thought he did not treat Frau Lange as if he considered her a "dear old friend." He looked at her as if he rather wondered whether she would bite, and his manner to her was one of polite and dignified endurance. A little before eight she disappeared from the room, but no one could mistake her whereabouts, because she had occasion to express her opinion of Auguste on the other side of the folding doors. When these were thrown open the Christmas tree, blazing with the combined light of a shilling's worth of wax candles, met the view of her guests. Frau Lange stood near it and awaited their approach.

"Did you ever see a Christmas tree before?" said Herr Hansen to Nell.

"I never saw one like this," said Nell enigmatically. The usual interchange of presents followed. Mrs. Frere, in response to several unmistakable hints, had bought her sister-in-law a handsome tapestry tablecloth. Frau Lange accepted it graciously, although she pointed out that the colors did not quite match with her carpet and curtains. But she admitted in an aside to Herr Hansen she was exceptionally fas-

tidious. She was born with right feeling for color. Herr Hansen said he had proof of this in the cigar case she had embroidered for him. The girls stared ruefully at their aunt's gifts to them—two clumsily shaped tippets of the cheapest, most ragged-looking fur. Mrs. Frere had to thank Frau Lange for a shawl, which was striped like a zebra and rather thin. Hilary thought her aunt must be one of those people who purchase what no one else will—such things as you see in shops, with wonder that anyone can be found to carry them away.

When the five grown-up people had stood about near the tree for a quarter of an hour four of them felt inclined to sit down again in the larger room. The two girls strolled back there first of all, and by doing so gave offense to Frau Lange.

"In my opinion," she said to Herr Hansen, "young girls should be like lambs in spring, always ready to frisk and caper. My sisters and I used to dance round the Christmas tree and sing songs; and the poetry we wrote on an occasion like the present! My verses always brought tears to the eyes. My youngest sister had a different talent. She made puns and jokes, most witty jokes, I assure you; but my nieces can do nothing. It is as if they had received no education at all. You may exert yourself in the highest degree to provide them a pleasure, and they hardly trouble themselves to look at it. I am grieved to see young people so *blasé*. I think, Helena, that one of your children might have composed a poem to present with your tablecloth, just as an expression of gratitude. It would have cost them nothing but a little ink and paper."

"We never thought of it," said Mrs. Frere regretfully. "Hilary is very fond of reading poetry, but I have never known her write it."

"That is just what I say," answered Frau Lange; "they won't do anything that takes trouble. I don't know what you spent on their education, but the results are very poor—very poor indeed."

Mrs. Frere sighed and joined her daughters. She did not know how she could put her sister-in-law in the wrong, but she wished it was possible. Unfortunately, the girls did seem out of spirits this evening. Their aunt had ruffled them all day, and all day memories of many a happy Christmas had floated across their minds in melancholy contrast with the present one. Last year their father had lived and loved them.

Herr Hansen must have guessed at this, because, about half an hour later, when Frau Lange left the room, presumably, as Nell said to her mother, to baste the roast goose, he followed Hilary into the smaller room and said to her:

"Last Christmas my dear mother was still alive. It is the same with you. A year ago your father lived still. I had many invitations for to-night. I did not know where to go. Then I remembered that you, too, would be sad and not merry, so I came here."

"I have been wondering all the evening why you came *here*," said Hilary.

They were hidden by the tree from the eyes of Mrs. Frere and Nell in the other room, and their voices were covered by the twang of Nell's banjo. She had begun to strum the accompaniment of an old song for which her mother had asked, and which she had half forgotten. The melody and the words came back to her in snatches.

Hilary had not expected Herr Hansen to follow her. She had left him on the sofa next to her mother when she sauntered back toward the tree without purpose. As she approached it she thought she would look at her hideous fur tippet again, and perhaps try it on. It still lay on a table behind the tree. Herr Hansen must have got up deliberately to join her here.

"I can take care of myself," he continued, in a musing tone. "My trouble is of the soul only; but you, and your sister, and your mother—you look ill. You are not happy here, I am sure."

Hilary hardly knew what to reply. Herr Hansen looked at her out of his kind, honest eyes, and said in a persuasive voice:

"Perhaps you have changed your mind."

The girl began to understand what was coming, and the sudden sight of it took her breath away. This very moment, without warning, without time to think, good fortune danced her way again.

"Have you ever considered what I said to you in London?" resumed Herr Hansen. "Do you remember it?"

"Oh, yes! I remember," said Hilary. She heard Nell singing in the other room. She heard her mother's voice when Nell halted.

"Can you not give me another answer to-day?" said Herr Hansen, with mild solemnity. "Do you not see now that it is best to marry? I should take care of your mother and sister as well as of you."

"I believe my mother is dying," cried Hilary, from the depths of her misery; "and Nell looks like a ghost."

"I know. I saw Mrs. Theodore, and she told me about young Preston. A contemptible fellow!"

"He is going to marry for money."

"Yes; after showing the whole world that he loves your sister. It is contemptible."

"Yes, it is," agreed Hilary.

"He should have waited and worked."

"Yes."

Herr Hansen looked at the girl anxiously. Her eyes and voice were dreamy, and she seemed to answer her own thoughts rather than his spoken words.

"It is different for women," he continued; "they cannot work."

"They can wait," said Hilary, with a blush. She felt as if she had made a full confession.

"Even that is not always convenient."

"I cannot agree with you, Herr Hansen. What holds good for a man holds good for a woman. To

marry for money is, as you say, contemptible. At least it would be for me."

"But we are very good friends. We get on well together."

"Oh, yes! But——"

"I am sure that if you were my wife——"

"No, no," interrupted Hilary, "it is impossible."

He saw that she meant what she said.

"I think you are wrong," he urged.

She shook her head.

"I am right. If I said Yes, you would be entitled to think of me as you do of Arthur Preston."

"My dear child," said Herr Hansen affectionately, "the cases are different. A young girl soon learns to love her husband. I want to take care of you. It grieves me to see you here. For your mother's sake you should come to me."

"Oh! don't say that," cried Hilary.

In the silence that followed he watched her wrestle with this idea. Finally she lifted her eyes and looked at him again.

"I cannot," she said.

He did not speak, but she saw his face fall. Nell's song went gayly in the outer room. Hilary's spirits were not raised by it. She began to think of all she had thrust from her, to wonder whether there was anyone on earth who would not call her an arrant fool. Possibly Dick would approve, but even of him she could not feel quite sure. On the brink of ruin she had refused prosperity, had let good fortune pass her by. To-morrow despair might come and find her unprotected. How difficult sometimes to know the nearest duty. Ought she to have acted for her mother's comfort instead of for herself? Henceforward it would be more terrible than ever to see her mother want. What would become of them now?

"Where is Herr Hansen?" cried Frau Lange, dashing noisily into the larger room. "Supper is quite ready; but imagine, Helene, when I went down twenty minutes ago I found the goose dished up

already and getting cold. With that girl my eyes have to be everywhere at once. Herr Hansen, allow me to show you the way upstairs to the dining room. You have seen the lights in my house before, but you have never been in the dining room. You must not expect too much. My aim is to have everything plain and good. I do not care for display. My nieces wished to put flowers on the table, but I would not allow it. I go into the garden when I want flowers, and to the dining room when I am hungry. It appears to me that a roast goose and a white camellia do not suit each other."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

NOTHING annoyed Frau Lange more than to be omitted from any invitation addressed to her relatives and guests. The Werners always gave offense in this way. They were evidently determined not to accept her. Frau Werner had never yet been inside the house. She had returned Mrs. Frere's visit, and refused to go in when she heard that the English ladies were not at home. She had left one of her own cards and one of her husband's for Mrs. Frere. Frau Lange considered this behavior most impertinent. She said so much about it that Nell threatened to frame the two cards and present them to her. But every civility shown to them sent up the domestic storm signals. Frau Lange was one of those curious people who hanker after society while they do nothing to gain a welcome in any section of it.

The invitation for New Year's Eve had arrived in due course. Frau Werner asked Mrs. Frere and her two daughters.

"I cannot go out at night," Mrs. Frere said.

"Shall we refuse?" suggested Hilary. "Then we need say nothing about it to Aunt Bertha."

But Nell seemed inclined to accept, and when Mrs. Frere noticed this, she insisted that the two girls should go by themselves. They would have to drive back in a cab, and that would cost a good deal, but a little cheerful society would do Nell all the good in the world. So the invitation was accepted, but Aunt Bertha did not hear of it directly, because with one accord her guests put off the unpleasant task of telling her. At last, when the day itself arrived, she led up

to the subject. She expressed a hope that the whole household would follow her example and go to bed, as usual, that night, at ten o'clock.

"We cannot," said Hilary. "We have promised to spend the evening at the Werners'."

"When? How? Why was I not told? It is quite impossible unless you sleep there. You must certainly sleep there."

"We have not been asked to do so," said Hilary.

"Of course not! If there is any discomfort or inconvenience it must fall on me. Who do you suppose is going to sit up half the night and let you in?"

"No one need; we can take a key."

That remark hurried on the explosion bound to come. It scandalized Aunt Bertha. Was she to leave the front door unbolted, and be murdered in her bed? Not while the house belonged to her. Nor could she allow two young girls to shelter under her decorous roof after running about Hamburg, at midnight, on New Year's Eve. She supposed they meant to walk home? They did not contemplate spending, no one knew what, on a cab, when it was very doubtful whether they had enough in their pockets for the doctor's bill? They did contemplate that preposterous piece of extravagance? Then she had nothing more to say. Auguste should certainly sit up for them; the key she refused altogether. It did not matter much, as it was only for once. Next New Year's Eve would see them all in the workhouse. Charity and good nature had its limits. She had given her sister-in-law the most generous of welcomes, but she could not forever harbor three people incapable of thrift, of effort, or even of gratitude. Besides, by next year her circumstances might have greatly altered, and even if they were far more affluent, her power of hospitality would be circumscribed. At present she felt free to give her liberal impulses full scope, but if ever she had another person's comfort to consider, she might be obliged to stifle her natural bent, which was all toward open-handedness and benevolence.

Hilary hardly listened, and made no reply. In her aunt's reproaches there was a grain of truth more painful than all the silly fault-finding with which she wearied their ears. Mrs. Frere and Nell were incapable of thrift, and the consequences of their folly fell with equal force on the three women so closely connected by habit and affection. Hilary could not separate herself from her mother and sister, and bid them hurry to the workhouse if they would, while she toiled arduously, honorably upward. She meant, indeed, to set to work somewhere, somehow, directly she got the chance; but how to get it still perplexed her, was still an unsolved problem. The working world pictured itself in her mind as a crowd from which she was relentlessly shut out, and, to force an entry, grit and time and knowledge would be required. She had neither time nor knowledge, and there were dark hours in which her present idleness looked like want of grit. By now she should have found someone in Hamburg to pay her for something she could do. Where were the children she might have taught? the invalid lady she could have tended? the counter behind which she ought to serve? or was there, in England, any more inviting career for which her training fitted her? And so her thoughts traveled on the old, old round again, and halted as usual at her own absurd incompetence.

The discomfort caused by Frau Lange's unbearable temper reached a climax on this, the last day of the year. After the second breakfast Nell rushed out in a storm of wind and rain to escape from it, and wild as the weather was Hilary felt relieved to see her go. She dreaded an outbreak that would drive them from the only roof willing to afford them a shelter. It was very unheroic, she knew—to be anxious for a longer sojourn in conditions so sordid, so ignoble; but their little store of money would melt still more quickly in lodgings than it did here. Besides, Mrs. Frere was unfit both for a sudden removal into rougher quarters or for the agitation of a real breach with her sister-in-

law. That it might come to this, if Nell lost her temper, there could be no doubt. They lived on the thinnest ice, and to step with unceasing self-restraint and care often seemed too much for the girl's shaken nerves, for her embittered spirit. Once or twice, of late, she had started up from table in the midst of a meal and fled from the room, leaving Hilary to make any excuses she could. She turned white and angry at the mere sound of her aunt's scolding voice; she told Hilary she understood the impulse to hurl what is handy at an enemy.

When people live together in discord, the merest trifle will hurry on the threatening crash. When the foundations are rotten, one gust will help the edifice to fall. At a later date it suited Frau Lange to say that she had lived with her relatives in peace and friendship, and that it was a great shock to her to discover how unhappy they professed to have been under her roof. But, of course, this was not true. For many weeks every hour had tightened the strain, every meeting made matters a little worse. Daily companions cannot find each other insupportable and remain ignorant of the fact. It must betray itself at every turn. It must, at any rate, have been plain to such a vain and touchy woman as Frau Lange. When she said she had not perceived it she lied.

On New Year's Eve Nell had come in rather late and gone to the bedroom to rest before dressing. Outside the rain fell in torrents, melting ice and snow into slush. The country roads were ankle-deep in mud, the woods had been almost impassable. The girl's clothes were certainly in a shocking state. Her skirt fell to the ground with a swish when she unfastened it, her hands were black before she got her boots off; she wrung rain-water from her hair. Mrs. Frere pressed her to take quinine, and so stave off a cold. Hilary helped her into a dressing gown, and picked up the muddy frock in dismay. Would it ever look clean and tidy again?

"Poor people ought never to go out in bad weather,"

she said, half in fun. "Mud, like everything else, costs money. You have ruined this gown."

Nell hardly answered; at the moment she was struggling with her boots. Then, being dry shod again, she began to brush her hair. It soon separated into little rings and curls, as becoming to her as a mane to a lion. It seemed a pity that she should ever twist and pin it into a smaller space. Hilary offered to try and arrange it in the fashionable Hamburg style, which was more elaborate and artificial than the London one, but which Hamburg people naturally thought more becoming. The girls were still debating the question, aided by advice from Mrs. Frere, who said it was always wise to be a Roman in Rome, when one of the doors was violently opened and Frau Lange appeared—in a rage.

It seemed that Nell had not wiped her boots sufficiently, or not held her skirts high enough; at any rate, on her way from the front door she had left marks of mud upon the uncarpeted stairs. Frau Lange said that Auguste was busy, and that her niece must at once remove them. She had brought a wet grimy looking rag for the purpose, and this she threw toward Nell. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that she threw it at her. It fell on the floor close to the girl's feet; she kicked it a little way from her with a grimace and an exclamation of disgust. Her aunt told her to pick it up quickly, but Nell did not stir. Frau Lange then turned to her sister-in-law.

"Why don't you speak to this insolent girl, and tell her to obey me? They would not behave as they do if you did not encourage them. You should see the mess she made. Auguste washed the stairs this very morning, and used a lot of soap. Soap is expensive, I can assure you; if you had to buy it, you would find it out."

"Nell, darling," began Mrs. Frere feebly, but her daughter's expression checked her. "They never did such things at home," she said, in a tone of apology, to Frau Lange. "You must make allowance for the customs of another country."

"It is not that," said Hilary, forgetting her prudent anxiety to keep the peace. "Aunt Bertha speaks in such a way——" She did not finish, but her eyes flashed with anger.

A battle royal ensued. Frau Lange said that, in her own house, she supposed she might speak as she pleased; but her nieces rejoined that, in their opinion, some decency of behavior was due even to guests. They had stayed too long in the house to be considered guests? Then did Aunt Bertha mean that she felt free to insult and ill-treat them on that account; because, if these were her curious and original views, they had better depart to-morrow. They quite believed that she counted the hours until they rid her of their presence. In fact, if they might say so, her behavior had sometimes led them to suspect as much. What had they to complain of? Oh! but they did not complain. She could see for herself that the joint household did not succeed very well. The machinery creaked now and then. Yes, it would be difficult no doubt to find her match for generosity and peaceableness; but then they must put up with something inferior. Frau Lange said that she had opened her doors to them when their own home broke in pieces; for several weeks she had sheltered and fed them out of her own pocket; the sum they paid her now for board hardly covered half her week's bills. She protested, she swore, she wished she might die if she profited a penny a month by them. But it would be easy to ruin herself for their sakes, and yet not reap a word or a look of thanks. That was what upset her. They could not deny that nothing pleased them; and she, on the other hand, would confess to anyone who asked her that she had never seen girls so entirely spoiled and useless. When she thought of their future she wept. She could not forget that Helene and her beloved husband had been brother and sister. She wished her heart was less tender, but she was as God had made her, and some people were born to suffer. She would now go and wash down

the stairs with the cloth her niece refused to touch. She was fifty years old, and rheumatic, but she would rather her back ached all night than go to bed in a dirty house. She took no particular credit to herself for acting in this way; she only felt grateful to her elders for having brought her up so well.

The girls knew by experience that their aunt's fits of fury were soon exhausted, and were always followed by a lachrymose mood, in which she talked of her own kind heart and wished to patch up the breach she had made a few minutes earlier. Twenty-four hours hardly passed without some scene of the kind. They were both sick to death of them. By this time they knew the truce never lasted long. They watched Frau Lange stoop stiffly for the rag, and with a face that was still very red and angry leave the room. Hilary hesitated a moment and then followed her. She thought that, if this disagreeable piece of work must really be done, she would not let the older woman do it. She had made her protest; but she found that while her aunt scolded, Auguste had removed every speck of mud to be seen. Frau Lange looked at the spotless, painted stairs in disappointment.

"The impertinent girl!" she cried; "I shall give her notice at once."

Hilary went back to the bedroom and shut the door.

She found her mother anxious and unhinged. She asked what would become of them now. A serious quarrel with their aunt was a new and irremediable misfortune. She did not blame the girls; she admitted that Bertha was exasperating, but she had evidently made up her mind that this breach, like many earlier smaller ones, must be patched up. She thought she would make peace overtures that very evening, and she wished the girls would dress themselves and go. She could not sleep without some guarantee that they would not be turned out of doors twenty-four hours hence. Of course they might go into lodgings, but if they did Hilary must promise not to worry over necessary expenses. Mrs. Frere did not like the idea

of a move, though. She did not know how one could be undertaken immediately, as she had hardly any money in the house. She must write to London for more next day. Hilary sighed and turned silent when her mother said this. Every inroad made on their little fund cost her a pang.

The girls went into Hamburg by a crowded tramcar, and did not talk much to each other on the way. It cost them a considerable effort to start at all. They were not in the humor for a frolic; but directly they entered Frau Werner's large well-lighted room they felt better. Kindly faces greeted them, kindly voices made them welcome. The whole family had gathered there and some intimate friends. Two or three of the older ladies expressed great disappointment at not seeing Mrs. Frere. One had been her schoolfellow, another had been confirmed on the same day, a third discovered that Nell's figure was just what her mother's used to be thirty years ago. For a little while the girls found themselves the center of attention, comment, and discussion. They knew now how to dress for such an occasion as this, and wore high black woolen gowns and gloves. Nell had pinned a little sprig of holly berries at her throat, a touch of coquetry that was not allowed to pass without remark.

A very good idea; eccentric, but pleasing. Why had her sister not done likewise? Their mother had always shown great taste in dress. Her daughters had not inherited her brilliant complexion; or were their pale faces the effect of London air? Had they not been very glad to exchange London for Hamburg? Did they not find German life very easy, very comfortable? But they spoke German with an English accent. What a pity! Surely their mother never spoke English to them? Always? What a sin! Why did she? German is a much finer language—not so mixed; and so easy to pronounce and spell. Could they understand everything that was said to them? Could they read a simple book?

Hilary, who knew her Goethe better than any

German she had yet met, said, Yes, she could read a simple book.

The arrival of Herr Hansen diverted public attention from her for a time and she sat down near one of the windows, where Olga Werner soon joined her.

"I have never met you on the ice again," said the girl.

"I have not skated once since that afternoon before Christmas," said Hilary.

"It was you Mr. Lorimer had gone to see. I did not know until he told me in the theater."

"He came again next day. We saw him then."

"He is going to New York very soon."

"Not yet. He has altered his plans."

"How do you know?"

"I had a letter from him the other day."

Olga looked at her with more surprise than pleasure.

"My mother would not let me receive letters from Mr. Lorimer, unless I was engaged to him," she said.

"I suppose not," said Hilary.

"Is it different in England, then? Do you correspond with all the young men you know, though you are not betrothed to them?"

Hilary reflected a little before she replied.

"I do not correspond with any young man but Mr. Lorimer," she said, after a pause. "We are very old friends. I am not betrothed to anyone."

"Do you hope that you will marry an Englishman?"

Again Hilary did not answer at once. The child's downright questions perplexed her.

"I hope that I shall," continued Olga.

"It is not likely, I suppose," said Hilary, glad to evade the inquiry that concerned herself.

"Why? My cousin Pauline married one. She is very happy."

"Oh! no doubt," said Hilary.

"My mother does not approve of foreigners. I prefer them," said Olga, with a little sigh.

Just then an invitation reached Hilary to join in a new round game at the other end of the room, and she

had to comply. While she talked she had watched the company separate into two groups and settle down to their amusements. The men took possession of the card-tables, and with great contentment began to play Skat. The women and a couple of schoolboys gathered together and listened to Frau Werner while she explained the new and diverting game of nose-rings. The preparation for it seemed to be simple in the extreme, consisting only of a box full of ordinary elastic rings and the printed directions.

"Each player," said Frau Werner, "must fix one of the elastic rings firmly on his nose. When this has been successfully accomplished the leader gives the word, and all the players immediately try to get the rings off again without the aid of their hands. Roars of laughter will be excited by the grimaces and contortions of the players."

Everyone said it promised to be a most entertaining game, and, to the astonishment of Hilary and Nell, everyone with cheerful good temper put a ring on her nose and proceeded to make ridiculous efforts to get it off again. There was no doubt about the laughter raised. It disturbed the skat-players, who stopped for a moment between two rounds and looked on at the grotesque spectacle. Nice faces and pretty faces were twisted into unrecognizable shapes like carnival masks. Mouths gaped widely, eyes were starting, noses and cheeks were strained and wrinkled, yet no one seemed to think the diversion undignified, and no one but the two English girls objected to share in it. They did not like to state their objections openly, so they cheated. They put good-sized rings on the very tips of their noses, and got them off again with a minimum loss of self-respect. But even so their cheeks were hot, and as they watched their neighbors they felt more inclined to pity them than to join in laughter.

"You never saw this played before?" said Herr Hansen, who had given up his hand at Skat to a newcomer, and seated himself at Nell's elbow.

"No," said Nell.

"It is quite a new game here," said Olga Werner.

"Yes. You must not think it is one of our national games," said Herr Hansen, addressing Nell again. He seemed rather shy of Hilary to-night.

Nell answered with vivacity, and drew him into a brisk conversation. When a new game was proposed, and the players rearranged themselves, she got up and went to a window at some little distance from everyone else. Herr Hansen followed her there. The rain had ceased, and a watery moon shone down on the Alster. The gaslights twinkled on either bank in city and suburb. Everything near was dripping wet, and at a little distance all outlines melted into the mist. Hilary could see her sister's face when she turned now and then toward Herr Hansen. Its expression was not reassuring. The girl looked excited and ill at ease. Many glances were directed toward the window by Frau Werner and her friends—glances of surprise, and, after a time, of displeasure. Hilary noticed with growing uneasiness that her sister's behavior evidently gave offense, and, when the game allowed it, she got up with the intention of somehow warning Nell; but she was too late to do any good, as supper was announced before she reached her sister. Everyone rose and went into the dining room. Hilary found a seat next to Olga Werner, and when she looked at her opposite neighbors she found that Herr Hansen and Nell were side by side. She felt sure from Frau Werner's manner that the arrangement did not commend itself to her, but, of course, a hostess who does not appoint her guests to seats cannot expect them all to comply with her unspoken wishes.

In Hamburg a gala supper is served in a succession of courses, all hot, excepting the ice that arrives toward the end. At Frau Werner's house every dish was exquisitely cooked and chosen to satisfy epicures. Herr Hansen said he had not tasted such venison that winter, and yet he knew that the same provision merchant served his hostess and him. Herr Werner said that a bachelor could not expect his food to be

cooked as if there was a lady in the house to superintend details. Hansen must marry before the year was out. A chorus of laughter greeted that impossible recommendation, and the good-humored host amended it by saying that Hansen might betroth himself in the old year and marry in the new. He drank to Hansen's future bride. Herr Hansen merely nodded and helped himself to venison a second time. He seemed troubled by his neighbor's small appetite, and when the dish first came round Hilary saw him look for the best slice and put it on Nell's plate. He also filled her champagne glass the moment it was empty, and entreated her not to let turkey with truffles go by untried. They talked English to each other, and did not join much in such general conversation as went on.

"Your sister is rather pretty," said Olga Werner, as if this most obvious fact struck her to-night for the first time. Hilary did not betray that she thought the compliment clumsily put. She made allowances for the young lady's imperfect English, and also for a different standard of beauty from her own. In Hamburg, most of Herr Hansen's friends considered him an exceedingly fine looking man; elderly, of course, when compared with a girl in her teens, but well preserved and plenty of him.

Supper had been announced at eleven, and it was now nearly midnight. The men began to look at their watches. An immense bowl of hot punch, aflame, like an English Christmas pudding, was set before the host and ladled into little glasses. The young people left their seats and crowded in front of the four windows, which were all on the same side of the room, and narrow. In the expectant hush of the next few minutes no one spoke above a whisper, and from the Jungfernstieg below came the sounds made by a great expectant crowd. Someone near Hilary threw a window open and she looked out. It seemed as if the city had assembled there in tens of thousands. As far as she could see, head to head, shoulder to shoulder, men, women, and children stood packed in a dense

mob waiting for the church clocks and bells to bring in the new-born year. Even among that vast multitude all noise subsided as the moment they waited for came close. Hilary watched them and it seemed as if, with one accord, they held their breath. The first stroke from the old Michaelisthurm sounded alone, with the second it had company, all the clocks of Hamburg chimed in, and from thousands of her children on the Jungfernstieg a shout went up of welcome and good wishes.

In Frau Werner's dining room thirty-five people were doing just what ten thousand of their fellow-citizens strove to do below. They shook hands all round, and said *Prosit Neujahr* to everyone in turn. The men and boys leaned out of the windows now and again and exchanged congratulations with the mob. Hilary felt loath to turn her head indoors, but she, too, had to shake hands with each individual present, and both offer and receive congratulations twenty or thirty times. It was quite bewildering. Half an hour later most of Frau Werner's guests had followed her back into the drawing room, and when Hilary arrived there she looked round at once for Nell. It was time for them to bid good-by.

"Where can my sister be?" she said to Olga Werner.

Her question seemed to cause a general silence, and she felt at once that something had gone wrong. She looked round for Herr Hansen and missed him too. She looked at Frau Werner's face and saw it stiff with displeasure. Everyone stared at her and no one spoke. Hilary did not know what to do. She took a step back toward the dining room, but she had left it a moment since, and she had seen that Nell was not there.

"Have you seen my sister?" she said again to Olga Werner.

The girl looked distressed and still kept silence, but Frau Werner said, in a voice that bristled with annoyance:

"Your sister has left the house with Herr Hansen, fräulein. We have no idea where they have gone."

Hilary's amazement and vexation did not know how to find expression. She turned very white, because she wondered whether her sister's escapade would be considered disreputable or merely silly and ill behaved. Her impulse was to defend Nell as well as she could by pretending to treat it as unimportant.

"My sister had a bad headache," she said. "I dare say she asked Herr Hansen to take her home."

"A very extraordinary thing for a young lady to do," said a sour-looking old spinster.

"I am surprised at Herr Hansen," said Frau Martha, the least amiable of Frau Werner's married daughters. "*He* ought to have known better."

Hilary silently echoed this opinion. What had Herr Hansen been about? and ought she to go home herself now, if only to show that she felt certain of finding her sister there? After all, any explanation but the very simple one must be impossible, and it was ridiculous to behave as if the heavens would fall because Nell had done something unusual. If she had eloped with Herr Hansen, the Werners could hardly look more scandalized. Hilary made up her mind to go home. Everyone else in the room had fallen a little away from her by this time. The hostess was surrounded by her departing guests. The sour-visaged woman went off without bidding Hilary good-by. The two married daughters shook hands stiffly, and did not repeat a general invitation given earlier in the evening; but they were hardly two steps from her when they stopped stone-still, with exclamations of surprise. There, in the open doorway, stood the missing couple, both looking solemn and elated, as if they had news to tell. Hilary rushed forward, and then, just as she reached them, hung back. Herr Hansen was saying something in a loud, deliberate voice, and his words took her breath away.

"My friends," he said rather gravely, "you see a *Brautpaar* before you. Congratulate us!"

It did not matter much during the next ten minutes what Hilary thought or felt. She had plenty of time to collect herself before the buzz of surprise, inquiry, and congratulation subsided. Had they gone out of doors on purpose to settle it? Why did Herr Hansen not confide in his host? There was a little breakfast room at hand where more than one young couple had made things up. How far was Herr Werner's advice at supper responsible? When would the wedding take place and where? The young lady would have a great deal to learn before undertaking to keep house for a German husband. Of course she would buy her outfit in Hamburg. She must get her linen from that shop at the corner. Did she like the notion of settling in Germany? Where did they think of going for their wedding journey? They must come back to the dining room at once and allow everyone to drink to them in champagne.

"Well, Hilary," said Nell, catching her sister's hand in her own icy cold one, "have you nothing to say to me?"

"I don't know what to say," stammered Hilary. "I am so surprised."

For she saw no signs of happiness in Nell's feverish manner, and when she looked at Herr Hansen he avoided her eyes. Hilary felt puzzled and astounded, and she heard an echo of her feelings through the chorus of polite congratulation. Frau Werner wished to behave kindly, but she could not hide her sense of shock and doubt. It is one thing to welcome the stranger within your gates, and quite another to see her capture the wealthiest bachelor you know. To the mother of unmarried daughters such an event must needs be trying. Besides, she was genuinely fond of Herr Hansen, and she could not think his choice a prudent one. This slip of a girl, this alien, would not devote herself to him with German steadiness and loyalty. Besides, she was incompetent. What did

she know of cooking, of linen cupboards, of sitting down for the day to accomplish invisible darns. Tears rose in Frau Werner's eyes as she clinked glasses with the bridegroom; but she wished him well from her heart, and, as she kissed Nell, she softened at the sight of the girl's white face, and whispered a generous message of congratulation to Mrs. Frere.

CHAPTER XIX.

POLTERABEND.

"I SPOKE to your aunt last night," said Mrs. Frere, as soon as the girls were awake next morning. "She seems willing to let bygones be bygones, which is all you could expect of a more amiable woman. And you must remember that she did not make herself; besides, I find there is no doubt about the sunstroke. I always suspected her of wearing a wig, and last night I caught her without it when I went into the sitting room. I asked her how it was, and she told me her hair had never grown again since. She was quite ready to make friends—up to a certain extent. I dare say she finds us trying, just as we find her. She began again about your skirt, Nell, but I pointed out that a frost had been foretold, and that in dry weather it could not happen."

"To manage Aunt Bertha successfully, you want great experience in managing children," said Hilary, who was wide-awake, and had listened rather absently to what her mother said.

Nell sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes. She had not slept through the first part of the short night left to them, but toward morning she had fallen into a heavy, dreamless doze. Her first thought was that she had important news to tell.

"I am not going to stay here much longer," she said.

"Don't say that, my dear," began her mother anxiously.

"I am going to be married, mamma. I am engaged to Herr Hansen."

The announcement hardly reached Mrs. Frere's understanding at first. She looked at Nell and saw that she was quite in earnest. She looked at Hilary and saw that she did not smile.

"But I always thought he came after Hilary," she stammered.

"He is going to marry me," said Nell.

"You need not look so hard at me, mamma," said Hilary. "I am not distressed; at least not on my own account."

"But it is the most extraordinary thing," persisted Mrs. Frere. "He never took the least notice of Nell—hardly seemed to see her; are you sure he did not mistake you for Hilary, dear? Where did he propose? Was it in the dark? But how could it be at Frau Werner's house. What did he say?"

"He said he would come and see you this afternoon, and ask your consent."

"I never was so much surprised in my life," said Mrs. Frere.

For the moment her pleasure seemed almost lost in surprise. How had it come about? Was Nell herself not taken unawares? What did the Werners say? Surely they were amazed and confounded. Anna always talked as if no man could look at any other girl when her daughters were visible. Herr Hansen must have been very clever to get his chance on such an occasion. He ought really to have seen Nell's mother before he spoke, but Mrs. Frere did not feel hurt. Of course he knew that any mother would welcome him, and that, in England, young folks manage such matters for themselves. The girls would find out now how delightful it was to be engaged to a German. He would send his bride flowers every day, and she must embroider his monogram on various articles and present them to him. She might do one with her own hair on a cigar case. It was difficult, of course; perhaps silk would be better at first. They might go into Hamburg that afternoon and buy things. Had they talked of their

marriage yet? Of course it could not take place until Nell was out of mourning.

"Why not?" said Nell. "If Herr Hansen likes, it shall take place at once."

"But, my dear——" began her mother.

"I want to get away from this house," said the girl. "I mean to get away. If I don't marry Herr Hansen I shall do something else. I will not hang about here engaged to him for nearly a year. I could not stand it."

"I thought you were marrying him to escape from Aunt Bertha," said Hilary. "It is not right. You ought not to do it, Nell. It is not good enough—for him."

"He knows it," said Nell.

"I am very glad you are going to marry Herr Hansen," said Mrs. Frere, "but I can't understand why it is you and not Hilary, or what Hilary means by saying you are not good enough for him. He is rich, of course, but then you are young, and you will get your looks back when you are happy and well dressed again. I am sure Herr Hansen will think he ought to wait though, however impatient he may feel."

"You had better not urge it, mamma, if you want the marriage to come off," said Nell.

The girl's tone, like her face, was almost grim. She did not look any happier to-day than she had done since her father's death; and when she dressed she only put on her tidiest black gown because Mrs. Frere begged her to do so.

As the morning wore away, the magnitude of Nell's news seemed to Mrs. Frere more and more real and delightful. Their position would be, in all respects, altered by such a marriage, she maintained. Hilary could not quite see this. Her mother and she would still be on the brink of want. They could not live on Herr Hansen's money. Mrs. Frere rather unwillingly admitted this, but said at the same time that one fortunate member in a family can always help

the others, and that Herr Hansen, being a German, would have a deep regard for the claims of kin, especially as he seemed to be a very lonely man himself. What time did Nell expect him to arrive? She must see that the best sitting room was warm and tidy. What would Aunt Bertha say?"

"What, indeed?" said Hilary, with emphasis.

"You mean she wished to marry Herr Hansen herself, but it is absurd. She must be ever so much older. If she is disagreeable, I shall tell her that she is not the only person disappointed, because I happen to know that Anna Werner thought of him for her Olga. She was only hesitating between him and Dick Lorimer."

"I am afraid Aunt Bertha may be disagreeable," said Hilary.

"But it is quite ridiculous, my dear. Herr Hansen only called at the house once a year until we arrived, and, of course, at Christmas he came after you—after Nell, I mean."

"I wish to tell her myself," said Nell, with a vindictive note in her voice.

About three o'clock, when Frau Lange and her guests were just sitting down to dinner, Auguste announced Herr Hansen, and said that she had shown him into the "best" room. The mistress of the house looked fluttered at once.

"Why has he come now? How unlucky I am! I meant to dress myself after the second breakfast, and then I had to spend all the morning in the kitchen making this *nudelsuppe*. He must really wait while I pop on my black silk."

"Who did Herr Hansen ask for, Auguste?" said Nell.

"For you, *fräulein*," said the girl, looking at her mistress with a scared face.

"Go and tell him I will be down directly. You need not put yourself out, Aunt Bertha. Herr Hansen has come to see me."

Frau Lange looked angrily at her niece.

"Nonsense," she said.

"He is very fond of me."

"You flatter yourself."

Nell got up and went toward the door.

"Come back, you impertinent girl!" shrieked her aunt. "I do not ask you to entertain my visitors. I would not inflict anyone so ill-mannered on them."

"I suppose that when my Braütigam calls on me I may go and see him," said Nell, in a stiff, dignified way. She just waited for an instant to watch Frau Lange's amazement, and then with an unkind little laugh she left the room. Hilary felt almost sorry for the staring, speechless woman at the head of the table. Her chagrin was so visible, her surprise so immense.

"Is it true?" she gasped. "Does he mean to marry that little minx?"

"Nell has accepted him," said Mrs. Frere, much offended. "He is a good deal older, and not an Englishman, but I shall not refuse my consent. I hope they will be happy."

"Not much chance of that for him," said Frau Lange. "What a fool a middle-aged man can be!"

She did not say more just then, and Hilary thought they had escaped easily. If their aunt had turned them neck and crop out of doors on hearing the news, her nieces would not have been surprised.

That was an exciting afternoon for Mrs. Frere. Her interview with Herr Hansen went off most satisfactorily. He showed no annoyance at hearing that his bride was penniless, and, indeed, assured Mrs. Frere that he had guessed as much. Luckily, he had money enough and to spare. The suburban house should be at once redecorated, the flat in Hamburg must be given up, and a larger one taken in a good situation. It rejoiced him to find that Nell did not desire a long delay. Mrs. Frere would easily understand that, at his age, marriage presented more attractions than courtship. The necessary legal formalities would occupy some time, but he

thought that everything might be in order six weeks hence. Meanwhile, cards announcing their engagement must be printed and sent to all Herr Hansen's friends. He and Nell would then have to pay a formal call on the married ones, there would be some dinners given in their honor—in short, Mrs. Frere knew as well as he did what duties devolved on a betrothed couple in Germany. He feared Nell would find them manifold and tedious. Wherever it was possible they should be lightened for her. On account of her mourning the wedding itself would necessarily be a very quiet one. Herr Hansen spoke of Mr. Frere with great respect and regret.

Mrs. Frere came upstairs again charmed with her future son-in-law.

"He has brought Nell a double heart of roses and maiden-hair. Such a pretty idea! And he has given her two rings—the wedding ring and a splendid diamond one."

"The wedding ring already!" exclaimed Hilary.

"My dear, don't you know in Germany the wedding ring is always used first as the engagement ring?"

"Out of economy?"

"I don't know. It is the custom; but Herr Hansen said that he knew it was not so in England, so he got this other one for Nell as well."

"Is he very much in love, do you think?" asked Hilary, whose bewilderment grew as she listened.

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Frere. "For a German he is not demonstrative, though. He looks rather solemn and anxious; but I am sure he means to be very good to Nell. I hope they will get on comfortably. He asked me if she knew anything of housekeeping, and I had to confess that she did not. I told him, though, that it is very easily learned, and that German women make too much fuss about theirs. Why, here is Nell already. I thought Herr Hansen would have stayed rather longer."

"I told him I always went for a walk in the after-

noon," said Nell, sitting down at the foot of the bed. She seemed listless and tired, more fit for a sleep than a walk. Hilary looked straight at her sister's left hand, and saw the flash of diamonds on one finger, and the plain gold band.

"Where are your roses?" she said.

"I left them downstairs. Do you want them? They will not live in water. They are stupid wired things."

"You must have a respectable outfit," broke in Mrs. Frere, who, ever since she came up, had been busy with pencil and paper. "It is all the more necessary because you have no dowry. For the first year or two you cannot ask your husband for clothes, and you need not think he will offer you any. There never was a man yet who thought his wife wanted money for dress, even when his own tailor's bill stares him in the face. I don't say he won't give you money, but he will be surprised to hear that you really need it. I can't do much for you, of course. Anna Werner told me only the other day that each of her daughters had six dozen of everything, and she means Olga to have the same. She says a girl's character shows most strikingly in the choice of under-linen. One wants finery, and another thinks of what will last. Next time I see her I must ask her advice as to shops, and I shall say that as you are going to be so well off, we care more for style than for durability."

"How much did Frau Werner spend on one girl's trousseau?" asked Hilary.

"Five hundred pounds," said Mrs. Frere.

"Mamma! We have not one hundred pounds left, all told, unless you are allowed to use the trust money."

"But, my dear child, in Germany the bride has to buy all the house linen. You must conform to the customs of the country."

Hilary held her peace in despair. Next day she took Nell aside, and begged her to be content with a

small, simple outfit ; but the girl seemed as blind as her mother to the need of economy. She said she liked things nice. Did Hilary want her to buy common clothes that would be unwearable when they were bought ? You only married once, as a rule, and a bride was expected to do her husband credit. Their mother knew better than Hilary what German customs imposed in this respect. Hilary's panic about money grew rather ridiculous. What good did it do to worry about the future ? You never knew what shape it would take. They might all be dead six months hence. Meanwhile, Nell agreed with Mrs. Frere, nothing they bought should be trimmed with imitation lace.

When Aunt Bertha was told that the marriage would come off as soon as possible, she said that, in that case, she could not have any festivities in celebration of it at her house.

"I am not surprised at your heartlessness," she said, "but I will not countenance it. What would you have said if I had asked you to my wedding six months after poor Hans' death ? I might have done, I can assure you. A widow with a little money is simply besieged. That is why I see so few people. When I found that every man who entered my doors wanted to hang his hat in my hall, I said to myself, I must put a stop to it. I don't know what you are laughing at, Nell, unless it is that you wish, as usual, to behave with impertinence. Poor Herr Hansen ! How I pity him ! I lay awake all night wondering what I could say to congratulate him. I suppose I must dwell on your good luck. I can do that with a clear conscience. But I shall explain to him that my respect for your blessed father's memory prevents me——"

"You need not trouble, Aunt Bertha," interrupted Nell. "I told Herr Hansen at once that I wished to be married in Hamburg, and dine at a hotel afterward. Nothing would persuade me to spend my wedding day in this house. Suppose we came back from church with muddy boots ? I don't know why

we stay here another six weeks. Mamma seems to wish it, but——”

“Your mamma, being born a German, has some regard for decorum,” said Aunt Bertha. “She would not insult me by leaving my house the moment fortune smiles on you again.”

“I thought you wished us to leave,” said Nell. “You said almost as much the other night.”

“You probably misunderstood me. Your knowledge of German is very imperfect. I cannot say your presence adds to my happiness, but I should not wish my old friend, Herr Hansen, to fetch his bride from furnished lodgings. It would reflect on me. All Hamburg will know that he is marrying my niece.”

Nell doubted whether all Hamburg would be much impressed by the fact. That it was impressed by the news of her betrothal she soon discovered. Perhaps the exact degree of surprise shown was not flattering. People talked as if the announcement took their breath away, and congratulated the Freres rather too effusively on their luck. It was known, of course, that Nell had no money, and her good looks were not above question. She was not plump, she was not rosy, and, like the lilies of the field, she could neither toil nor spin. On the whole, it was widely whispered that Herr Hansen had done a foolish thing. No one but Hilary thought that Nell was, perhaps, more foolish still. Everyone behaved with new and astonishing politeness when the engagement became known. Nell, in spite of her mourning, lived in a world of calls, dinners, nosegays, and poetical speeches. Many of Herr Hansen's friends gave banquets in honor of the future happy pair—banquets at which long speeches were made in praise of Herr Hansen.

Hilary grew a little tired of it all. She began to wish that someone would stand up and speak in praise of them, or, at any rate, of their father. Among their own friends this engagement would have been celebrated to a different tune. Perhaps Herr Hansen deserved all that his fellow-citizens said of

him. Perhaps he was a compendium of all the virtues, ornamental and otherwise ; but his trumpeters brayed over loudly and over long. The six weeks dragged.

Aunt Bertha's temper grew no sweeter as time went on. Whatever arrangements were made for Nell's marriage seemed to give offense. She refused to celebrate it in her house, and refused to be present at it anywhere else. She objected to take charge of the wedding presents, and grew furious when Frau Werner arranged to exhibit them. When Nell's wedding-clothes arrived her aunt said that if Herr Hansen saw them he would break off the marriage, they were so useless and so extravagant. Mrs. Theodore sent the bride a traveling-bag fitted with silver-mounted brushes and bottles. Frau Lange said that such things were not respectable. The hotel servants would think Nell was no better then she should be if she used them. What did the wife of an honest German merchant want with silver brushes and powder pots? Nell had better put a plain wooden brush in her trunk, and set these things aside till she ran away with an actor.

The letter that accompanied Mrs. Theodore's bag contained a few lines of congratulation. It also mentioned that Sophia's marriage to Arthur Preston had taken place about a week ago. The happy pair were now in Naples, where, perhaps, Nell and her bridegroom would come across them.

"We ought to send Sophia a present," said Mrs. Frere. "It is not too late. You have several duplicates, Nell. You might spare her a gong or a cucumber cutter."

Nell's face was dreamy. She did not attend to what her mother said, but went on sorting some of the clothes with which the room was littered. Her mother and she had spent the greater part of the last six weeks in shops and closeted with milliners. As box after box arrived full of elegant and costly garments, Hilary sometimes wondered whether her mother and sister were fit to be at large. Their recklessness seemed to her insane. Nell was on the eve of

marrying a man with money, but the bills for her wedding outfit would come to her mother, and to meet them it would be necessary to sell nearly half the trust money. Mrs. Frere considered herself very wise because, before giving any orders for clothes, she had ascertained that part of the trust money might be applied to such a purpose. She said that the consequent loss of income would not matter to Hilary and her because, in any case, their present income did not suffice for their needs. Half the money would belong to Nell and might as well be spent on her. The fortunate child would never again need it as badly as she did now. Mr. Theodore admitted that Mrs. Frere had a right to the sum of five hundred pounds on the occasion of a daughter's marriage, but he objected to pay it in until the marriage was an accomplished fact. So Mrs. Frere sent for every penny at her present disposal. She said that she positively must have ready money. Hilary asked her what they were to do when it had melted away. They had no more furniture to sell. She gave great annoyance to her mother and sister by putting this kind of unanswerable question. They called her the family raven. This afternoon, as she helped Nell pack her trunks, she felt inclined to croak. Wherever her eyes fell they saw signs of an unnecessary outlay. Why should her sister have ordered that fur-lined traveling-cloak when her bridegroom had given her one handsomer still? When would Nell wear a yellow silk tea-gown, smothered with lace—in Hamburg? or half a dozen dinner dresses cut low and made with long trains? Herr Hansen had told her that he had all the house linen collected by several generations of ambitious housewives. He had shown Mrs. Frere two rooms at the top of his house literally stacked with sheets and table-cloths, some of it homespun and above a hundred years old. Yet Nell, encouraged by her mother, had bought more, chiefly, as it seemed to Hilary, that it might be on view at the shop when their

acquaintances called there to see the trousseau. She thought sometimes that grief had hardened her sister's heart and softened her mother's head, the one was so selfish, and the other so silly. Yet she felt sorry for Nell. This afternoon, for instance, she looked at her finery as if she hated it.

"Take care, my dear," said her mother, when she saw the splendid traveling-cloak—Herr Hansen's last gift to his bride, thrown in a heap on the floor. Nell listlessly picked it up and let it trail over her arm.

"Did you marry for love, mamma?" she said suddenly.

"What funny questions you ask, child! Of course I did. Your poor father was a very good-looking young man. Hilary is the image of him. We fell in love over croquet. We used to play with old Mrs. Theodore's children, you know. Mrs. Theodore never saw it. When we told her we were engaged she went into hysterics at once."

"Why?"

"There are women like that. I often say it is a mercy the law allows only one husband apiece, otherwise some of us would annex twenty. However, she came round in time, and I was married from her house. It is curious that I had no home of my own at the time, and now you have none. Things do turn out so contrary. If you were to marry Herr Hansen, why couldn't you do it eight months ago in your own home, with your father to give you away?"

"You were very poor when you were a girl, I suppose," said Hilary, "otherwise you would not have come to England by yourself?"

"I have often told you that we never knew at home whether we were poor or rich," said Mrs. Frere. "My father was bankrupt one day and making fortunes the next. He had a genius for business. Unhappily he died at the wrong moment."

"Should you have married my father if you had not loved him?" asked Nell,

"You remind me of old Mrs. Theodore. She used to put that kind of useless question. When Hilary was born she asked me which I would rather have drowned, my husband or my child. Her conversation was never cheerful."

"Have you ever known anyone who married for money?" persisted Nell.

"Of course," said Mrs. Frere placidly. She was sitting up to-day in her easy-chair, and she had the bodice of Nell's wedding gown in her hands. It had arrived from London that morning, with no myrtle on it. In Germany a bride is bound to wear myrtle, so Mrs. Frere had undertaken to fasten a few sprigs of it among the orange flowers. She was too deeply engaged with this agreeable occupation to pay much attention to her child; but she chatted on:

"What do you suppose Mrs. Theodore married for? She wanted money, and she got it. Most people would rather have money than anything; and a woman cannot make a fortune unless she is a *prima donna*."

"Mrs. Theodore is a very cheerful, prosperous person," said Nell musingly.

"Why shouldn't she be? She has all she wants."

"Yes," broke in Hilary, with a touch of indignation, "she has all *she* wants; but some of us want more."

"Then you must be very greedy," said her mother, patting the satin sleeve. "I should be content with a tenth part of what the Theodores spend."

"I am not thinking only of money," protested Hilary. "There are other things in the world worth having."

"Certainly," said Nell; "but if you can't get them you may as well have money. I would rather have married Arthur than Herr Hansen. I was very fond of Arthur. I hate the sound of his name now. And I would rather drown myself than starve in an attic, or live another month with this old harridan. I would have waited for Arthur; but now that he has jilted me, I'm not going to spend the rest of my days in

sackcloth weeping for him. I'd rather weep in diamonds."

"You show great good sense," said Hilary, wondering in her own mind whether her sister's cynical mood would last over her wedding day.

Mrs. Frere looked at her children with puzzled eyes. This marriage gave her unmixed pleasure. Why did they speak of it in such a tone, and drag in Arthur's name? She thought Nell had forgotten him.

"This is ready to try on now," she said, holding up the bodice. "I long to see you in it. We must look at the veil too."

The sight of her mother's contentment helped in some measure to console Hilary for the many unsatisfactory circumstances connected with her sister's marriage. On the whole, she felt inclined to hope well of it, at any rate for Nell. She thought her sister's happiness really depended a good deal on ease and plenty. She flourished when she could have what she wanted, and pined on a starvation diet. Hardship withered her; ill winds did her harm. Some creatures, like some plants, need sunshine. They deteriorate in the shade.

It was Herr Hansen who puzzled Hilary. Why did he not look more ashamed of himself? He had proposed to the younger sister a week after being rejected by the elder one, and yet he trod the earth as if an applauding conscience supported him. She had tried to sound her sister on the subject. She even asked how the proposal had come about; what had led up to it; whether it had given Nell a complete surprise. But Hilary soon saw that such questions seemed to hurt her sister like a flick on a raw wound. She shied from them with some word or look of irritation that answered nothing.

The betrothed couple did not see much of each other except in public. Aunt Bertha had threatened to tell Herr Hansen she did not care to have constant billing and cooing going on in her house, but he did

not give her the chance. He hardly entered it. For three weeks out of the six that the engagement lasted he had to travel in Austria on business, and when he came back the days were not half long enough for the whirl of work and gayety into which his approaching marriage forced him for the time. Nell and he met every day in furniture shops, and at dinners given in their honor by his friends. Whatever further acquaintance they made with each other they made in the presence of spectators.

In Germany Polterabend, the evening before the wedding day, is usually celebrated with great rejoicing. A polite generation has given up smashing crockery against the doors of the bride, a noisy old custom from which the evening gets its name. But some elaborate form of entertainment is still in vogue, and this is given either by the bride's parents or by their intimate friends. It had been arranged long ago that Herr Hansen and Nell should spend their Polterabend with the Werners. Frau Werner had preserved a strict silence regarding the details of her programme, but it was known that she had issued a large number of invitations, and that her children were, in some way, expected to surpass themselves.

Even Frau Lange received a card of invitation, and, to the dismay of her relatives, determined to go. They wondered how she would behave and what she would wear, whether the presence of strangers would abash her, or whether she would consider the occasion a good one for a display of her peculiar powers. Her costume was sure to be outlandish. The girls thought their aunt must have come away from Peru with trunks full of clothes made twenty years ago for someone else, the stuffs were so creased, the fashions so antiquated, the colors so outrageous, and the sizes so various. They wondered fearfully what she would fish out and wear on Polterabend. It never seemed to occur to her to have a new garment made, or even an ancient one altered.

When the evening came Hilary and Nell finished

dressing before their mother, and went into the dining room to wait for her. Hilary looked at her young sister, and tried to realize that she was legally Frau Hansen already. The civil marriage had taken place in Hamburg that morning in the presence of Mrs. Frere, Herr Werner, and one of Herr Hansen's friends. Hilary did not go. The afternoon hours had not been agreeable. The bride came back half-frozen, white, and silent. Even her mother wondered vaguely whether anything was wrong; but Nell did not seem inclined to bemoan herself. She said she felt sleepy, and wished to lie down. It was manifestly Mrs. Frere's duty to do likewise; so Hilary drew the blinds and sat as still as a mouse in the darkened room. The darkness and the silence did not help to make her thoughts lively. Once she felt sure she heard her sister sob, and she spoke to her; but Nell did not reply. Altogether it had not been a cheerful afternoon.

When the evening came, however, the bride took great pains with her toilet. She wore a vaporous-looking gown, the color of full-blown lavender blossoms, and when she was ready she looked very elegant and fair, but her mother did not feel quite satisfied.

"I don't like a young bride in lavender," she objected. "You ought to have worn white, as you are in mourning and cannot wear pink or blue."

But at this time of day Nell could not make any alteration, and when, to please her mother, she had pinned on some white flowers and chosen a white feather fan, she declared herself ready, and joined Hilary in the dining room. Presently their aunt arrived in a gown they had never seen before. Indeed, from its mode and its creases, they could hardly tell when it had last beheld the light of day. It was made of bright crimson plush, and plentifully "relieved" with frills of white cotton lace. About the clothes Frau Lange from time to time unearthed, there was always a cheap and moldy flavor that suggested as rigid an economy in tailoring as she exer-

cised in food. She loved finery, but not its price. In her wig she had fastened a full-blown white camellia, and in her bosom she cherished no less than three of these engaging flowers. She carried in her hand a pair of short white gloves trimmed with swansdown, and a small imitation-ivory fan. Round her neck and arms she wore massive chains of gold.

"O Bertha!" exclaimed Mrs. Frere, who entered the room at the same moment by another door, "why didn't you put on your black silk?"

"I am not in mourning," said Frau Lange, highly displeased. "I suppose you think I am too well dressed. This gown was made in London, so it ought to satisfy you."

"Made in London!" repeated Mrs. Frere. "But how did you get it?"

"Through the *Exchange and Mart*, five years ago, when I was staying with you. I only gave a musical box for it—one that Hans bought, and which was always getting out of order—so I had the best of that bargain. Of course the dress doesn't fit as if a tailor had made it for me, but the lace hides a good deal. What a dull color Nell has on to-night. Most unsuitable! And Hilary is in white, as if she was the bride. Absurd! And neither of them has a necklace on, or even a bracelet. They might have taken a little more pains with themselves. I have a handsome set of jet ornaments that I don't mind lending Hilary, if she will take care of them."

The girls threw their cloaks on in a hurry and fled downstairs. They did not look forward to entering Frau Werner's room behind Aunt Bertha.

Even in Hamburg, where the "young person" is taught to know her place, the bride of to-morrow was the guest of the evening. Everyone looked toward Nell with interest and welcome when she arrived. The grotesque figure of her aunt created a slight sensation at first, chiefly because Frau Lange's society manner was as conspicuous as her costume. She wreathed her face in smiles, made elaborate courtesies,

and excused herself loudly to Frau Werner for the slow development of their acquaintance. Now that the ice was broken, she hoped shortly to invite her hostess to a meal. Frau Werner, who had her own carriage, would not find the drive a long one. Of course, her rooms were not as spacious as these, but one could breathe in them. How many people were here to-night? A hundred? And yet she did not see a single familiar face. Truly the world is a large one! Frau Lange looked round the room benignly, with the air of a duchess who finds herself in an assembly where she is unknown. Most people were seated already, and all the seats were arranged to face a small impromptu stage put up in the room leading out of this one. Right in front were two chairs garlanded with flowers.

"Look!" whispered Nell to her sister, "those are for Herr Hansen and me. What fools we shall feel!"

She was not mistaken. Directly she had said good-evening to her hostess, Herr Hansen came forward and led his bride to the place of honor. Olga Werner presented her with a bouquet, Mrs. Frere and Hilary were invited to occupy seats in the front row, and then the performance began. What became of Aunt Bertha her nieces did not at once perceive. From where they sat she was not visible. The entertainment lasted above an hour, and consisted of several recitations and a one-act operetta. The recitations were home-made, and full of allusions to the bride and bridegroom. These gave great pleasure and won loud applause. When the curtain fell, Herr Hansen made a solemn little speech, in which he thanked his friends for their sympathy. After that, people got up and began to form into groups, and to talk and laugh. Quite a crowd surrounded the next day's bride and bridegroom. The host and hostess stood near them, so did Mrs. Frere and Hilary, and several of Frau Werner's most honored guests. Suddenly Hilary saw her aunt making her way toward them from a remote corner of the room. Frau Lange

looked red and angry. She planted herself at Herr Werner's elbow, and listened with a derisive smile to some complimentary remarks he made to Mrs. Frere on Nell's good looks and good spirits.

"My poor Martha spent her Polterabend in tears," he concluded.

"In my opinion, a girl who is going to leave her home next day ought to look as if she regretted it," said Frau Lange aggressively.

Herr Werner gazed at her through his spectacles, and wondered who she was. He had been told and had forgotten again.

"But the child has no home," he said; "and she goes to such a good one. My dear friend Hansen——"

"I must protest against your insinuation," interrupted Frau Lange, bristling with indignation. "Since her father's death my niece's home has been with me."

"Of course, of course!" said Frau Werner hastily, "my husband never remembers anything."

"I do not need to be told that she is going to a good home. I have known Herr Hansen ever since I came back from Peru five years ago. I am sure I wish him every happiness."

Frau Lange sighed. Herr Hansen put his heels together, and, after bowing his thanks, moved away, with Nell beside him.

"I am one of those who speak their minds, if they die for it," burst out Frau Lange, as she looked round for approval. "I wish he was going to marry a German maiden—one of your beautiful daughters, for instance, Frau Werner. I grudge him to a foreigner, good honest fellow that he is."

With the matter of Frau Lange's observations many persons present were in secret sympathy, but no one felt inclined to countenance the manner in which they were made. Some turned away; some looked amazed; Frau Werner felt affronted at the implication that her children had been passed by. Hilary

wished the earth would gape and swallow her aunt. Mrs. Frere felt driven to expostulate.

"I married a foreigner," she said. "It turned out very, very well, I am sure."

Frau Lange shrugged her shoulders, and smiled in a compassionate manner that made those behind the scenes long to shake her.

"Are you coming to the wedding to-morrow?" asked Frau Werner, brusquely changing the subject.

Frau Lange hesitated. She had all along refused to have a place ordered for her at the wedding dinner, or even to be present at the ceremony; but Frau Werner's question sounded like a challenge of her importance.

"Who should come if I did not?" she inquired pompously. "Who else has as great a right as I?"

"But, my dear Bertha," began Mrs. Frere, and then stopped to find out the meaning of a nudge from Hilary. At the same moment the announcement of supper gave rise to a hasty dispersal of the crowd at this end of the room; and just as Hilary had managed to persuade her mother to say nothing more to Frau Lange on the subject of the wedding, the host came up to Mrs. Frere and offered her his arm. He led her to the place of honor on the bridegroom's right hand.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WEDDING DAY.

IN Hamburg marriages are celebrated in the afternoon. When the bride and bridegroom are at all fashionably disposed, the bride drives to church in a sort of state coach decked with flowers. The young men who have admired her send flowers to the church, and all the wedding guests wear full evening dress. After the ceremony there is a gala dinner, followed by toasts and speeches, but no crowd assembles in the hall or on the doorsteps to throw rice and slippers after the bride and bridegroom. They make off quietly by themselves.

Herr Hansen and Nell were not going to have their carriage trimmed with flowers. Their wedding was to be a very quiet one. The wedding dinner, to which only a few intimate friends had been invited, was to be served at a good hotel.

The plan of fixing a ceremony for a late hour in the day has its disadvantages. The hours are apt to drag heavily beforehand. Nell's trunks had all been sent away the day before, one to the railway station, the others to her future home. None of her possessions but her white satin gown and her veil remained in her aunt's house. When she woke on her wedding day there was nothing for her to do. All night it had been snowing small flakes out of a leaden sky, and there seemed no hope of a change in the weather. The clouds still looked leaden, and, before Auguste lighted the stove, the thermometer in the bedroom stood at freezing-point.

The three ladies spent a melancholy morning. Hilary felt sure that her mother was downright ill and

unfit to go out of doors, but she could not persuade her to give up seeing Nell married. Mrs. Frere owned that she had not slept, that she breathed with difficulty, and that though her hands were hot she felt very chilly ; but she refused to send for the doctor or to alter her plans for the day. She talked a great deal about her husband, and of how forlorn they would feel without him at the marriage feast. The girls, who missed their father every hour, felt harrowed by these reminiscences and lamentations. They would rather have thought of him and kept silent.

After the second breakfast Hilary had to go to one of the local shops, and while she was out she determined to make another effort to keep her mother at home that day. It was so cruelly cold, the wind took her breath away ; the fine hard snow beat against her face ; her breath came with pain and effort as she fought her way back through the storm. Even in a close carriage it would be madness for her mother to leave the house.

But when Hilary went into the bedroom her thoughts were diverted, for the time, by the sight of Mrs. Frere and Nell both dissolved in tears. Nell had thrown herself on her bed, and was sobbing loudly, while her mother sat close to the stove.

" Bless me ! " said Hilary, more vexed than sorry, " what's the matter now ? What is it, Nell ? What has happened ? "

" Nothing," moaned Nell, " only I'm so miserable, and so is mother."

" You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Hilary. " It is very bad for mother to be miserable."

" It is very easy for you to talk," objected her sister. " You're not going to marry a fat man you don't care for."

" Nell ! " thundered Hilary, " then why are you, you wicked girl ! "

" I don't know," sobbed the bride. " Go and tell him I won't."

" How can I when the civil marriage took place

yesterday? I feel like Aunt Bertha. I'm sorry for him."

"It is all through Aunt Bertha. If it had not been for her I should never have asked him to marry me."

"What?"

"I asked him to marry me when we went out to see the crowd on New Year's Eve. Didn't you guess? It's no use staring at me like that, mamma. Just remember that night, and the way Aunt Bertha carried on. I had to do it or drown myself. I thought of it when I looked over the railings at the water. It was raining. I spoke then and there, the moment the idea entered my head."

"What did he say?" asked Hilary.

"He seemed rather pleased after the first shock. He could hardly believe his own ears, he said, and then he thanked me for putting such trust in him. I trust him now."

"I should think so," said Hilary.

"I shall be ashamed to look him in the face," said Mrs. Frere, "after the careful way in which I have brought you up, and so proud as I have been of you. I always did say other girls might flirt, but mine were above it; but what is flirting compared with asking a man to marry you? I can't think how you got the words out of your mouth."

"I told him that English girls often did it nowadays."

"Then you told him what is not true," said her sister.

"Would you have been any better pleased if I had thrown myself into the Alster?" asked Nell fiercely. "I believe you would go on forever bearing anything." She had left off crying.

Hilary did not carry on the discussion. She remembered now what she had meant to say when she first came in.

"It is a terrible day, mamma," she began. "The cold throttles you, and the sky is almost black. There will be more snow before night."

"You will be back before night without me," said Nell gloomily.

Mrs. Frere could not answer at once because she was coughing ; but as soon as she could speak she said she would wrap up warm and shut the carriage windows. She must go.

By four o'clock they were all ready. At last Mrs. Frere saw one of her children dressed as a bride. She looked at Nell with ecstasy. How many times had she pictured her girls standing like this, in a white shimmering robe, crowned by orange-flowers, wrapped round by the veil. Nell might have stepped in at the window out of the snow, she looked so radiantly white. Herr Hansen's diamonds flashed at her throat. The heavy scent of lilies and gardenias clung about her ; she carried them in her bouquet.

"You must say good-by to Aunt Bertha," said Mrs. Frere.

Nell's mouth and eyes set harder at the sound of her aunt's name ; but before she made any reply Frau Lange herself opened the door and appeared on the threshold in a gala costume still spicier than the one she had worn yesterday.

"The carriage is waiting," she said, looking rather uneasily at her resplendent niece.

Nell swept forward in front of her mother and sister.

"We are quite ready. Good-by, Aunt Bertha. I suppose we may never see each other again. A long life to you, and a merry one !"

"My dear Nell," murmured Mrs. Frere, "you forget you will be near neighbors in summer."

But Nell had passed on, and arrived at the top of the stairs, where she stopped to pick up her train.

"I have changed my mind," said Aunt Bertha, her voice trembling with anger. "I am coming to the wedding."

"That is impossible now," said Nell. "You are not expected."

"Do you mean that I should not be welcome ?"

"I mean exactly what I say."

"But, my dear," expostulated Mrs. Frere, "if Aunt Bertha wishes to come——"

"Aunt Bertha should have spoken a month ago, or a week ago, or even yesterday," said Nell inflexibly.

"This is too much," screamed Frau Lange, "you wicked, ungrateful girl! What will the world say if I am not at your wedding, I should like to know; I meant to punish you for all your insolence by staying away, and this morning, at the last moment, I relented and dressed myself. And *you* say I am not expected. Who are you? It is my old friend Herr Hansen I wish to honor; but I shall not go. I have had enough of you all. I wash my hands of you. I shall shut my doors, and not one of you shall ever enter them again."

Frau Lange's voice had risen higher and higher as she worked herself into a fury. She gesticulated wildly, shook her hands at her nieces, and at last began tearing the ornaments from her neck and hair.

"She will have a fit," whispered Mrs. Frere; and very unwisely she went up to the raging woman and tried to take her hand. Her touch seemed to madden Frau Lange. At any rate she jerked out her elbow so violently that the blow would have sent her sister-in-law reeling back, if Hilary had not intervened and received the first shock of it herself. For a moment the girl felt stunned.

"Haven't you had enough?" cried Nell, from halfway down the stairs. "We are twenty minutes late already, through waiting to receive Aunt Bertha's blessing."

Hilary felt as if they had borne enough. Her aunt's repulse had been equivalent to a blow, and as soon as the girl recovered from it she began to consider how she could show her resentment. Her eyes flashed with anger.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she began, but Frau Lange brandished both arms and screamed her down.

"Go out of my house, all of you ! One is as bad and shameless as the other. I never wish to see one of you again."

"Come !" cried Nell imperiously, from the bottom of the stairs ; and, pursued by Frau Lange's shrill abuse, the mother and daughter joined the bride and got into the carriage.

The church was well warmed and well lighted. Friends were gathered there, and the bridegroom waited when the bride with her mother and sister arrived. In twenty minutes the simple ceremony was over, and Nell drove off with her husband to the hotel where dinner had been ordered.

You may guess that, after her sister's confession, Hilary watched the bridegroom with increased curiosity. She thought his manner to his young bride admirably kind. After dinner the speeches in his honor were long and various, but when he got up he spoke of Nell's father, and of the forlornness his wife and children must feel on such a day as this without him. The bride's face softened as she listened to her husband, and her eyes filled with tears. As Frau Werner watched her she thought, with a throb of surprise, that she might learn to love the girl. When everyone rose from table, their tongues loosened a little by wine and food, Herr Hansen approached Hilary, and under cover of other voices said, in a low tone, "I hope that your sister will be happy."

"I hope so," said Hilary. "I think she ought to be."

"Thank you," said Herr Hansen, looking pleased. He reflected a little, and then continued : "When a man arrives at middle age it is easier for him to transfer his affections. I was touched by your sister's appeal. I too was unhappy that night. I said to her, 'My child, out of two wounded hearts we will make one sound one. It has often been done.'"

He paused as if he expected Hilary to speak, but she felt too much flurried and taken aback to do so before he went on :

"Therefore, when we return to Hamburg, I hope your mother and you will pay us a long visit. I hope you will stay with us until you marry and return to England."

Hilary thanked him gratefully, and did not say that she thought the objections to such a household were various and insurmountable. She talked to Herr Hansen a minute or two longer, chiefly about her mother's health, and then went out of the room with Nell to help her put on her traveling gown. The sisters were accompanied by Frau Werner and Olga, and, of course, by Mrs. Frere.

"I suppose I shall see everyone again," said Nell, sitting down wearily and letting Hilary take off her wreath and veil.

Frau Werner looked puzzled.

"You will see no one again but your husband," she said solemnly.

"How droll! In England we all crowd round them, and throw rice and slippers, and shout, and talk, and kiss the bride. I don't like running downstairs by myself."

"It is the custom," said Frau Werner. "Besides, you will not be by yourself. You will find Herr Hansen waiting for you."

Nell first unclasped the diamond *rivière*, and then began to take off her satin gown. Hilary had already removed the long court train, at which Olga looked with envy, and her mother with mild disapproval.

"It is Olga's turn next," said Mrs. Frere, who seemed hardly able to sit up in her chair.

"No," returned Frau Werner. "I think Hilary comes first. She is older than Olga."

"Hilary refuses everyone," said Mrs. Frere. She spoke in a drowsy voice, and looked heavy-eyed.

"Her heart is probably in her own country," said Frau Werner.

"I used to think so," began Mrs. Frere, in a matter-of-fact voice, "but if Olga marries——"

"Mamma," interrupted Hilary, "I am afraid you

are nearly asleep. Look at Nell's hat. Do you think she should wear a veil?"

"Oh! my darling," said Mrs. Frere, stumbling to her feet and taking Nell into her arms, "are you really going? I shall never see you again. God bless you!"

Frau Werner beckoned to her daughter to follow her out of the room. They joined the wedding guests, and ten minutes later Mrs. Frere reappeared with Hilary. The bride and bridegroom had gone.

By this time everyone had noticed that Mrs. Frere was very ill. One of the wedding guests happened to be a well-known Hamburg doctor, and he took Hilary aside, when she returned to the room, and urged her to take her mother home at once. He went down himself with Mrs. Frere, and helped to pack her as warmly as possible into a cab. He told Hilary that she must summon their own doctor immediately, and he explained what remedies she might use until medical help arrived. Then he spoke to the driver, who said that, though the roads were deep in snow, he could get the ladies home. He promised the doctor to carry them safely. He lived out in that direction himself. So they started, Mrs. Frere drowsy, weak, and in pain, Hilary wideawake and anxious. At the last moment Frau Werner had run down with her own fur cloak, which she threw over their knees as an extra wrap; but nothing seemed of any use against this degree of cold.

The snow still showered down on the city, blown aslant by a gusty wind, and drifting to westward in immense heaps. Everywhere it lay so thickly that traffic was seriously impeded. Two hours ago the tramcars had ceased to run. The long, dull road leading out of Hamburg was almost deserted, though the clocks had only just struck ten. A few foot-passengers plunged through the snow, their steps unheard, and their voices reaching farther than usual between the gusts of wind. Hilary began to understand that her mother was very ill, much worse than she had ever been before. Mrs. Frere's hands felt

like hot coals, and yet she shivered incessantly. She had probably taken a violent chill the evening before, as they drove back from the Werners', and her bedroom all through the night had been bitterly cold.

Halfway home the cab stopped at the doctor's house, and Hilary had to plunge across the pavement, through two feet of untouched snow, only to hear that he was not at home. She left an urgent message, wondered by what means he got here and there in such weather, and returned to the cab, telling the driver to stop again at a chemist's shop close by. She had not a penny piece in her own pocket, so she tried to rouse her mother, and explain that she needed some money.

"Money, money!" muttered Mrs. Frere, in a lethargic way. "I have none. I gave the last sixpence to the hotel servants."

"Are you quite sure?" asked Hilary. "Let me look in your purse."

"I haven't a shilling either here or at home, my dear. Nell wanted so many things at the last moment. Don't you remember? What do you want money for now? Let us get home and go to bed."

Hilary did not like the notion of asking a strange chemist to supply her with goods she could not pay for, so she determined to wait and stop at a shop farther on where they were known. She put her head out of the window to tell the driver this, and was somewhat disturbed by the surly manner in which he answered her.

She wished more anxiously than ever that they were safe at home. She would have to rouse her aunt and borrow money from her to pay the cabman; but she could not imagine that even Frau Lange would raise trifling difficulties when she saw her sister-in-law's condition. It is so hard for a young tender-hearted creature to believe that suffering can fail to make its appeal. How slowly they were getting on now! The horse plodded at a snail's pace through the deep snow. Suddenly, when they were still half a mile from home, the driver pulled up in the middle of the road, clam-

bered down from the box, and told the ladies he would not go a step farther unless they paid him double fare. He had been an ass and a sheep's head to come as far as this without a clear understanding that it would be made worth his while. Hilary gave him the promise he required, and urged him to hurry on ; but it took them nearly twenty minutes longer to reach their own gate, and by that time Mrs. Frere was terribly exhausted and in great pain. Her breath, she said, hurt her like knives.

With some difficulty Hilary helped her mother out of the cab and across the front garden. She had told the cabman she would return in a minute to fetch their wraps and to bring him his fare.

"There is not a light to be seen," she said to Mrs. Frere as they approached the house. "I believe they have gone to bed," she cried, after listening for some sound of life in answer to her bell. She rang a second time, but no one came. With the third peal she broke the rickety bell. The handle came off in her hand, and there was an end of that means of communication. She hammered on the door until anyone in the house must have waked and heard her ; she threw gravel at her aunt's window, and heard a pane of glass smash. She tried to get round to the back and make Auguste answer her, but the high gate leading there had been locked, and she could neither break nor climb it. The only window in reach was protected by bars and shutters. No one could have forced an entry without skill and strong tools.

"What *shall* we do?" she cried, coming back to her mother.

"She said she would never let us enter the house again," said Mrs. Frere hoarsely.

"She didn't mean it," said Hilary, awe-stricken ; and as she spoke she heard her aunt make the threat, saw her frenzied face, saw Nell's derisive smile.

"She has locked us out," she said slowly. "Where had we better go?"

She did not wait for any reply from her mother,



"WITH THE DETERMINATION OF DESPAIR BEGAN TO RAIN BLOWS ON THE FRONT DOOR AGAIN."—Page 271.

but hurried back to the cabman, explained that she could make no one hear, and asked him to drive them to the village inn. He refused to budge without his fare. Hilary did not know what to do. She reminded him of his promise to the doctor, and pointed out that her mother was very ill, even a short delay might lessen her chance of life. The man replied that he wanted his fare. He scowled as he spoke, and looked suspiciously at the dark, silent house. Hilary asked him to come and help her rouse the inmates, but he refused to leave his horse. He added that she had made noise enough to rouse the dead. Perhaps the house was empty. How long did the lady mean to keep him waiting in the snow for his fare?

At last Hilary told him the truth. She had no money with her, and could get none until they were let inside the house. She thought he would have knocked her down when he heard this. He cursed her in the foulest language at his command, and to escape from him she ran back across the garden, and with the determination of despair began to rain blows on the front door again. Every now and then she ceased and listened, and during one of these intervals she thought she heard the sound of the cabman whipping up his horse. She remembered then that some of their wraps were still inside the cab, and, much as she dreaded facing the cabman again, she felt bound to fetch them; but when she opened the gate and looked out no cab was there. The man had driven off and confiscated the wraps in lieu of his fare. How silly she had been to leave them with him! Yet, if she had not done so, he would not have gone. She could only feel relieved at his departure. But what were they to do next? The wind whistled in her ears, and the snow filled her eyes as she turned back for the last time to bring her mother away. They could not spend the night on the doorstep. Though every yard cost Mrs. Frere a grievous effort, she must somehow reach such shelter as could be given in the miserable little village inn.

CHAPTER XXI.

FORTUNE'S FREAKS UNKINDE.

MRS. FRERE had sunk in a heap on the doorstep while Hilary tried to get into the house. There she began to dream. When her daughter helped her to her feet again she hardly knew where she was. In her speech she did not wander yet, but she was unfit for any effort, dazed, and very wretched. Hilary, ignorant as she was of everything to do with illness, saw that it would be useless to consult her mother. She must act for both as best she could. She decided that they had no alternative but to seek the shelter of the little village inn. She had not forgotten Herr Hansen's house, but to get round to the front door would take some time, and she knew that the only person there just now was a deaf old caretaker, who at this hour would probably be in bed and difficult to rouse. The delays had been serious enough already to kill her mother ; to encounter more would be the last degree of folly.

"Come, mother," she coaxed tenderly, "come, we must go on."

Mrs. Frere said she could not walk on, could not plunge a step farther through the heavy snow. How could Hilary be so cruel as to propose it ! Her limbs were like lead ; her head ached ; she shivered, and yet felt hot.

"I know, I know, but come," said Hilary. She put her arm round her mother and tried to keep her from falling, to help her on. The nearest way to the village lay through a suburban lane, with detached houses on either side surrounded by gardens. Here the snow lay in a sheet, and nothing heavier than a bird had

touched it yet. Every branch was loaded, every shrub weighed down. The wind had somewhat subsided, but it still blew the snow aslant their faces, and found its way beneath the loose folds of Hilary's evening cloak. Her hands, her bare arms, and her thinly shod feet were soon numb with cold. Her eyes ached and wept with it. It hurt her to breathe. But her own discomfort only helped her to understand, with increasing distress and compassion, what her mother must feel. She soon thought that every yard would be the last they could accomplish, and that they would have to sink into the snow and die there. She did not dare to leave her mother and seek help. She felt uncertain where to find it. No cab plied for hire at this distance from the city, and most respectable people were in bed. When at last the scarce and meager village lights were visible, Hilary felt as a storm-tossed crew may in sight of a haven. There were shelter, warmth, and human aid. She whispered encouraging words to her mother; she tightened her arm about her; she dragged her forward; she wondered whether the stress of the moment could give her the strength to carry the sick woman a few yards in her arms; but that was impossible, she found, and the effort she made toward it shook and troubled Mrs. Frere. It roused her too for the moment, and, with a final desperate spurt, she began to walk quickly, only to arrive, however, in a state of great exhaustion at the door of the inn, which stood a little apart from the rest of the village.

There were no lights in any window, and Hilary could find no bell. She hammered at the door with her fists, and, after a time, a light appeared at a first-floor window and the landlord leaned out to see who was there. By this time Mrs. Frere and Hilary were white with snow, their hair powdered by it, their clothes covered. They had no escort, and no luggage. In that wild weather they came on foot. Perhaps the man thought they were adventuresses, or even tramps; or he may have recognized that they were ladies, and

unsuitable guests in his rough drinking shed, for the wretched house was little more. At any rate, he shouted that he had no room to give them, shut down the window, and disappeared. Hilary was at her wits' end. If an inn refused them shelter, surely other people would; and yet the next thing to do was to try and rouse some of the trades-people whose customers they had been. There was the provision shop where they had occasionally bought dainties for Mrs. Frere. Perhaps she could make them hear, perhaps they would tell her where to go when they saw her mother literally dying of exposure. Another delay, another painful explanation before they were adrift again. It was more than five minutes' walk from the inn to the provision shop, and when they had traversed twenty yards Hilary began to think that they would never get there together.

"Will you wait here for me?" she said to her mother. "I will run on and ask about a room."

But Mrs. Frere clung tightly to her daughter's arm. "Do not leave me," she moaned. "I am very ill. I do not want to be alone."

"Will you try and come with me, then?" said Hilary.

Instead of answering, Mrs. Frere's grip suddenly slackened, and, with a terrifying groan, she slipped from her daughter's side to the ground. Hilary's heart stood still. She tried in great haste to raise her mother, but the slim girl had no strength to lift so heavy and helpless a woman.

"Let me be, dear," whispered Mrs. Frere, in a sleepy voice. "I shall be all right, if you let me be."

"You *must* not lie here in the snow," said Hilary. "You must let me help you up."

But neither her entreaties nor her attempts to rouse Mrs. Frere were of any avail. She did not know what to do. She took off her own cloak, rolled it into a pillow, and put it under her mother's head and neck, which were, of course, drenched in snow. She was afraid that Mrs. Frere was dying then and there,

so she dared not leave her. She tried shouting for help, but no one came. Probably her voice did not carry far enough in that high wind. When she had watched for a few minutes, kneeling in the snow, she began to think the danger of death was perhaps not immediate, and that she had better risk the brief separation and run into the village for help; but the moment she moved, her mother half roused and implored the girl not to leave her there alone. Hilary yielded once in the hope that Mrs. Frere's sleepy state might deepen; the second time she hardened her heart and said that she must go. Her mother's groans stabbed her as she fled.

Hilary almost ran into the arms of a gendarme. The man looked quite startled; and it is not to be supposed that he had ever before met a young lady running blindly ahead in such weather as this—a young lady dressed for a ball, moreover, and with no covering but snow-flakes for head, neck, and arms. He questioned her closely, with the authority assumed in Germany by a dog in office, and, thinking that he might aid her, she led him back to where her mother lay. This she soon regretted. He was a good-natured creature, but dense, garrulous, and ignorant. He inflicted on the impatient girl a long-winded description of the frost-bites he had seen in Russia and the popular cure for them. He seemed to think that Mrs. Frere was frost-bitten, and that Hilary soon would be if she did not take his advice. He offered to rub Mrs. Frere's hands and feet with snow. Hilary begged him instead to find them a lodging for the night, and to find it without delay. She imagined that she was talking to an English policeman, who thinks it his duty to be civil and of use. But this *Dogberry* resented the request, and turned sulky when she tried to insist on it. He suggested that the young lady's mother was probably suffering from a complaint still more common than frost-bite, and as he said this he waved his hand in the direction of the beer-shop close by. He also said that he would

be round this way again in less than an hour, and that, if by that time the ladies had not vanished, he would take them both to the police bureau. Hilary need not attempt to bribe him. He had never yet dishonored his uniform by accepting a bribe.

There was an uncomfortable pause. From Hilary's empty pockets she could not extract the coin the man evidently expected. She remained silent, and so did he. Then she said with decision, "Take us to the police bureau. Help me to carry my mother there. It is the best thing you can do for us, if you will not find us a lodging."

The man laughed, turned on his heel, and strode away. He was a stupid creature, who did not see that Mrs. Frere was ill, or understand that Hilary meant what she said. She ran after him for a few yards, but he easily outstripped her and was soon out of sight. The girl returned to her mother, and tried to make her understand that they must move again. Her own limbs were aching acutely with cold, and since she had taken off her cloak the snow melted and dripped on her bare neck and arms. She thought of the warm wrap she had relinquished as a starving man thinks of food. Her body hungered for the comfort of it, but she could not take it from under her mother's head. It was too dark just here to see Mrs. Frere's face very plainly. Her breath had grown more labored, her groans more distressing. She no longer talked coherently. Hilary tried to lift her again, but she could not manage it. She did not know what to do. She blamed herself for letting the gendarme go. She ought to have compelled him to help her.

In trying to lift her mother she had slipped on the snow herself, and for a short time she sat still where she had stumbled, with Mrs. Frere's head on her lap. The fall had shaken and wrenched her. She felt inclined to cry, but she drove back an impulse of which she felt ashamed, and the struggle braced her. She laid Mrs. Frere's head gently on the rolled-up

cloak again and stood up, determined to leave her mother and ask at the first house she came to for help. She would ask in terms that admitted of no refusal. Her mother should not die, like an outcast, in the snow.

Before acting on this resolution she stood and watched the sick woman with lingering concern. She saw that Mrs. Frere was very ill. The great doctor, Herr Hansen's friend, had warned her of it; but she did not know exactly what ailed her, or what course the malady would take. Suppose this restlessness and delirium increased? Mrs. Frere might get up and wander away while Hilary sought help. Or the stupor might grow suddenly worse, and end there and then in death. Hilary did not know whether it was safe to leave her mother for a moment, and yet she felt driven to go. It was terrible to be in the presence of such suffering without medical knowledge, without medical help. Her utter ignorance felt like cruelty, like sin.

She had not started yet, when she heard a man's footstep trudging through the snow toward them. She made up her mind to another and a bolder tussle with the wooden-headed gendarme, but as he approached she saw that it was a bigger man, and when he came quite close she recognized their own doctor. With unspeakable relief she hailed him, and he stopped in surprise.

The storm of snow and wind was gradually subsiding, and though the moon did not show, it lit the sky. The doctor could see Mrs. Frere lying on the ground, and Hilary with no wrap over her thin gown, shivering, cramped, and white with snow. Her teeth chattered so that she could scarcely speak, but she managed to tell him what had happened to them. He, it seemed, had tried in vain to get into Frau Lange's house, and was now on his way to see a patient in the village. Neither he nor Hilary wasted many words. He stooped over Mrs. Frere and shook his head.

"Will she die?" said Hilary.

He got up, but made no reply. He looked at the nearest houses of the village, and then at Mrs. Frere. Then he stooped again, and Hilary saw that he meant to lift her mother in his arms. She felt astonished at his strength, and envious of it. During the last few hours her weakness and her ignorance had cost her mother dear.

"Put that wrap round your own shoulders," he said, as Hilary prepared to follow him. In his own mind he expected the girl to be as ill as her mother twenty-four hours hence, but being a wise man he did not say so. He walked slowly and hardly spoke. Hilary wondered whether he had any plan, where he meant to take them, and what he thought of her mother's condition. His silence tortured her.

"Could you have compelled them to take us in at that tavern?" she asked at last.

"I would not send a sick dog there," he said curtly.

"There is no other inn near."

"I know of some rooms where they will look after you."

They walked on for a few yards, and then he stopped with his back against a tree to rest. He looked steadily at Mrs. Frere.

"You ought to have sent for me two days ago," he said. "I should have forbidden your mother to leave the house to-day. Why didn't you let me know she was worse again?"

Hilary hesitated. She could not tell him the truth, which was that they hardly knew how to pay what they already owed him.

"Is she very ill now?" she asked evasively.

What he said in reply was inarticulate but expressive, and with the conviction that he not unnaturally thought her a fool, Hilary pulled herself together and dragged after him again. She wished he could have carried her as well as Mrs. Frere.

At last they stopped at a clean-looking house half-way down the main street of the village. Hilary

rang the bell, and then propped herself against the wall. It occurred to her that she must look uncommonly like one of those most miserable creatures to be seen waiting outside a London workhouse on any winter afternoon, and that, without the doctor's introduction, they would probably have been turned away from this door too. If they had not met him, she supposed they would still be tramping here and there in the snow. Did the people who went to a workhouse often spend such a night as this? They looked like it. Perhaps she was dreaming, and would wake directly to find herself beside her mother in the snow again, with no doctor near. How he stared!

He thought she was going to behave in the traditional feminine manner, and collapse now that the strain had passed from her shoulders to his. A street light fell on her face, which was pinched and wan with cold. Her beautiful eyes were full of pain, and her young mouth set firm with resolve to bear it silently. Her fluffy hair clung about her brow and the nape of her neck in wet, half-frozen strings, and her gown, so trim that afternoon, now hung from her shoulders a mere discolored rag. He saw that she only kept her eyes open with great difficulty, and just before they were let into the house she did fall asleep for a moment, and had time to dream. She woke with a start and a radiant smile, with her hands stretched out to welcome someone who was not there. Even as her eyes opened her hands fell lifelessly, the shadows deepened on her face again, the smile died away.

The doctor had always been puzzled by these patients. They seemed so unhappily out of place in Frau Lange's house, so short of money, and so softly bred. He knew that Frau Lange's temper was almost insanely violent. Some years ago she had been prosecuted and fined for ill-treatment of a young maid-servant. He had rightly supposed all along that nothing but dire necessity would keep Mrs. Frere and her daughters in that household for a day. But he knew now that Nell had married Herr Hansen, and

he felt that he might warrantably provide her mother and sister with comfortable quarters and with a capable nurse. If he found that in Herr Hansen's absence they were friendless, he determined to see Frau Lange himself next day and frighten her into sending Mrs. Frere clothes, wine, and money. Mrs. Frere would die. He could have no doubt of that, and for her death, at this date, he held Frau Lange largely responsible. She had behaved inhumanly, and he did not mean to spare either her pocket or her feelings.

Meanwhile, for the rest of the night they must make the most of a warm, dry room, and such clothes as the woman of the house could provide. Some necessary medicines he would fetch from the village chemist himself. He told Hilary that she as well as her mother must go straight to bed; but when he came back he found the girl sitting up, and bent invincibly on staying with Mrs. Frere. She was deaf to his reproaches, to his commands. He half doubted whether she understood what he said. She looked at him with her dazed, beautiful eyes, frowned a little as if the sound of his exhortations wearied her, and turned from him to hang with mute, inactive grief over her mother's bed. He did what he could for Mrs. Frere, and then looked at the girl again; but at that moment her persistence was greater than his. He went away.

CHAPTER XXII.

LEBEWOHL !

MRS. FRERE died three days after the doctor found her lying in the snow. She never recovered consciousness, and passed away without much pain. Hilary did not collapse at once. She watched by her mother to the last, sent to the Werners for help, and wrote to Nell. Then she was very ill. April had come when she got up again and began to wonder, through the long, weak days of convalescence, what she had better do next. She used to sit at her bedroom window and watch the buds of a horse chestnut grow fatter and greener every day. For some weeks the tree and the afternoon sunshine were all she saw of spring. She heard that the woods were full of anemones already, that the nightingales were singing, that it was warm enough to sail on the Alster by moonlight. Once Olga Werner brought her a great basket of spring flowers ; but they were precisely and expensively arranged. Hilary longed to gather primroses in a Sussex copse.

Except the Werners, there had been no one to look after her even while she lay in strange lodgings dangerously ill. Frau Lange did not once come near her. She told the doctor, when he called at her house, that the lock-out had been owing to a deplorable mistake. She had clearly understood that her sister-in-law and niece meant to spend the night in a Hamburg hotel. Neither she nor her maid had heard the bell, or Hilary's shouts, or even the gravel that broke a window pane. They had been amazed next morning to find footsteps in the snow. The doctor did not believe a word she said. Her manner impressed him

most unfavorably, but he could not cross-question the maid, who would probably tell a different story. He could only listen with a skeptical expression, assure her she was lucky to sleep so soundly, and ask her to send on her niece's trunks at once. When he called again at the house he found it in the hands of a caretaker. She told him that Frau Lange, after dismissing her maid, had gone away for change of air.

Through some alteration in their traveling plans Nell never received her sister's letter. It lay unclaimed at an Italian inn. Meanwhile Nell's letters went to Frau Lange's house, were not sent on, and, of course, remained unanswered. Herr Hansen telegraphed to the Werners for news, and the reply, informing him of Mrs. Frere's death, came first by an unlucky chance into Nell's hands. The shock unnerved her completely. She broke down, and was forbidden to attempt the homeward journey. At the end of April Herr Hansen and she were still in Italy.

The Werners looked after Hilary to some extent. They did not pay her many visits, but they made themselves responsible to the landlady for necessary expenses, and so proved that the young lady had respectable connections, and might be taken care of without uneasiness on the part of a poor woman who had her living to earn. As soon as she could get out of doors Hilary went to thank them, and to tell them that, about a week later, she meant to start for England. She found Frau Werner sitting by herself in her favorite seat near a window, and in front of her work-table.

"But, my child," said Frau Werner, "how can you make any plans until you have consulted Herr Hansen? He is now the head of the family."

"He has no authority over me," said Hilary, in surprise.

"But who else is there until you have a husband of your own?"

"Need there be anyone? I am twenty."

"My dear child, every woman must take the advice

of some man in all important matters. My cousin Pinchen is fifty-six, and she would not go to Switzerland this summer until she got my husband's permission. She has never been married, you know, so she comes to him. At first he would not allow her to go; he said she could not afford it; but I helped a little, and in the end he gave way. Of course you must take Herr Hansen's opinion about everything until you put on a matron's cap yourself."

"But, Frau Werner, I have hardly any money," said Hilary. "I must go back to London and earn my living. I have been here half a year and found no opening. I cannot be dependent on my brother-in-law. I should not consider it right."

"But it is what he thinks right that you ought to do. How can you, a girl of twenty, know anything? What is it you propose? Will you travel under protection, go straight to the bosom of a friendly family, and wait there until you hear of a situation?"

"No," said Hilary, "I shall have to travel by myself, go into cheap lodgings, and hunt up and down London for work."

"Impossible!" cried Frau Werner, evidently scandalized. "It would not be respectable. A girl of twenty in lodgings by herself in Babylon! Do you know that several German and French writers agree in calling London the wickedest city in the world?"

"Really," said Hilary, looking unconcerned; "but it won't affect me, and I never read the police reports. I shall live in a respectable neighborhood on as little as I can, and find dozens of other lonely women doing the same."

"I never heard of such a thing," said Frau Werner.

"In London," said Hilary, "there are whole large buildings separated into little flats, and let to single working women. When I get on I shall take one myself."

"The single working women would be much better married," observed Frau Werner.

"To bring that about," said Hilary, "'you must let a good many men have two wives apiece. At present there are not enough husbands to go round."

Frau Werner looked scandalized, but not convinced. However, she bid good-by to Hilary very cordially, and said that she expected to see her back again very shortly. Herr Hansen would summon her, and she would, of course, come at his call.

Hilary wished that she could start that very afternoon. Having once made up her mind to see London again, she longed to be off. A Swiss peasant boy in exile is said to be home-sick for the tinkle of the cow-bells and for the sight of snow-clad mountains. Hilary longed to cross Oxford Circus again, and to hear a bus conductor invite her to 'Igh 'Olborn and the Benk; but she was far from strong yet, and she had a good deal to do. She must look through her mother's trunks, for instance, and decide what she would keep and what she would send to Nell—a task she had put off from day to day. It is such a harrowing business to rummage among the dead friend's treasures, to apportion them, appropriate them, throw them aside; but this afternoon, when Hilary got home, she unlocked the biggest trunk and began to unpack it. She was soon surrounded by the odds and ends Mrs. Frere had carried to Germany because she loved them. Old letters and nondescript treasures took up more room than clothes. Mrs. Frere had never cared to adorn herself, but only her two girls.

Hilary missed her mother every hour of the day—missed her companionship and her tender interest in all that concerned her children. It was wretched to come back to this empty room where no one waited to welcome her, or cared to hear what had happened. This evening, as the shadows fell and the dusk grew deeper, the girl wished that she was not alone. She had not grown used to solitude yet, and, especially at twilight, ghosts came to keep her company. To-night they came closer than ever, as if her mother's

things, strewn everywhere, had summoned them. The air felt heavy, and she set a window open and sat down near it. From her lap there trailed the brocade gown her mother had worn on the night of the dance at their home less than a year ago. The Brussels point that trimmed the bodice had long ago been promised to Nell. When the lamp came, Hilary meant to untack it and put it carefully away. She could not begin until she had more light, and meanwhile, being very tired, she leaned back and shut her eyes. Perhaps she dozed a little, because, without having heard anyone ascend the stairs, she was suddenly startled by a tap at her door, and by a voice she knew demanding admittance. She got up hastily and went half across the room, then stopped stock-still. Frau Lange stood before her.

"You!" said the girl. "*You come to see me?*"

"I have brought you these," replied her aunt, handing her half a dozen letters addressed in Nell's writing. Hilary took them.

"Thank you," she said, and then waited, expecting her visitor to go.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Frau Lange.

"I am going back to England."

"By yourself?"

"How else should I go? My sister is married. My mother is dead."

"Your mother was very ill when she left to go to the wedding," said Frau Lange uneasily.

"She was. Otherwise, what you did might not have killed her. I survived it, you see."

"Of course I thought you meant to sleep in Hamburg."

Hilary's icy silence and her inexpressive face were eloquent. Even Frau Lange understood that she was not believed.

"You refuse to take my word?" she said.

"Of course I do. If you thought we should not come back, why did you lock Auguste in her room so that she could not let us in?"

"What do you know about that? Have you been getting at Auguste? Has she written to you?"

"I have neither seen her nor heard from her, but I know that the noise I made must have waked you both."

"I did not expect you back," said Frau Lange. "I told you you should not come inside my house again. Why did you not believe me?"

"At that time," said Hilary, "we merely thought you a disagreeable woman. We did not know you were a downright wicked one. You say yourself you knew my mother was ill. We never supposed you would let her die in the streets. Do you understand what happened? She was dying at your door and you did not let her in. She had to drag through the snow when she was gasping for breath. Do you remember that night how the wind howled? We could hardly stand against it. At last my mother fell from sheer exhaustion, and lay on the ground freezing until—— I hope you see it. I hope you will see it when you are dying yourself. I see it night and day. She was in great pain and most miserable—— Why are you here? Go!"

Frau Lange started back as if she thought her niece might have struck her, the girl looked so angry.

After speaking of her mother in a voice of mournful indignation she had stopped, half-choked with grief, and then suddenly seemed to repent having parleyed with her enemy at all.

"What is the use of talking?" she cried. "What can you and I possibly have to say to each other now? You know what you have done."

"I am sure your mother would have died," said Frau Lange. "She was very ill."

"We shall all die, and until I do I shall remember that night."

Hilary spoke in a low voice, and with her eyes fixed on the floor. She was trembling with anger and weakness. She felt as if the last few minutes

had blotted out the long, quiet days of convalescence, and taken her straight back to the dreadful hours when she watched her mother sink out of life.

Before either of them spoke again the landlady arrived with a lamp, and then Hilary saw that her aunt wore deep mourning, and that she looked sallow and ill.

"It is not proper for you to go back to England by yourself," she began, when they were by themselves. "I never heard of such a thing. Why don't you come and live with me?"

"What?" exclaimed Hilary.

"Come and live with me."

"I would rather beg in the streets."

"Your mother would not have been so unforgiving."

"I am not sure. If you had turned me out of doors when I was dying——"

"You are a wicked, ungrateful girl. Luckily, I have a clear conscience. How will you earn your bread? I offer it you for nothing."

"Your bread would choke me. Is it possible that you don't see that?"

Hilary had sat down because she felt unable to stand any longer, but she did not invite her aunt to take a seat, and she was quite resolved that she would not shake hands with her at parting.

"I shall not repeat my offer," said Frau Lange, her voice rising as it used to do when she was on the verge of a rage. "If you change your mind, you must make advances to me before the week is out. Unless I hear from you, I shall adopt an orphan, and leave her all my money."

Hilary remained steadily silent.

"Do you want me to go down on my knees to you?" shrieked her aunt, edging nearer to the door every moment, and yet saying something more at each fresh step, as if she found her niece's adamant manner most difficult to accept. "If you come, you come as my daughter. That is under-

stood. I must leave my money to someone. I hope to live another thirty years certainly—I am not joking about the orphan. I have made inquiries. I can have one any age I like, and any complexion. There are all sorts and sizes at the asylum. It's very fine to be proud, but when one is hungry three times a day—well, I have done my duty and can sleep in peace to-night. When I get to heaven I shall say to my blessed husband, 'I offered your starving niece my home and my fortune, and she did not even open her mouth to say, 'Thank you.' He will not be surprised. He always said my generous heart would bring me to grief, and so it has. If I had not taken pity on you, and opened my house to you all, I should not be standing here to-day."

Perhaps it occurred to Frau Lange at last that at any moment she might quit the position she professed to find so disagreeable. At any rate, with a last lingering look of bewilderment at Hilary's profile, she turned really round, and went out of the room with a bang. As she tramped down the stairs, her niece's hardly kept composure gave way. Hilary began to cry, and to wonder whether she had been too hard on a creature only half sane. But behind all her thoughts and images in these days she heard her mother moaning in the snow. She felt sometimes as if the memory turned her heart to stone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LIFE IN A GARRET.

ALTHOUGH it was stormy weather Hilary stayed on deck. The ship might pitch and toss as it pleased, but it cut its way through the water homeward bound. Every wave that broke against the bulwarks was in an English sea. The wild air blew across her face and left a delicious taste of salt on her lips, the spray dashed over her, the wind whistled in her ears. She watched the chopping, dull green water. She listened to the sailors talking to each other. How pleasant to be back again where English was the common tongue ! Even her memories, even her apprehensions for the future, could not alter the exhilarating fact that every moment brought her nearer to the British Isles.

What she would do when she got there she hardly knew. She had twenty pounds in her possession all told, and even this belonged by rights to Nell. In accordance with Mrs. Frere's request, the five hundred pounds her daughter could claim on her marriage had been paid in at a Hamburg bank directly the marriage was an accomplished fact. Nell had arranged to leave the sum in her mother's hands ; and as after Mrs. Frere's death all the trousseau bills came to Hilary for settlement, Herr Werner helped her to get possession of the money intended for them. It soon melted away. Every post seemed to bring in unpaid bills either from London or Hamburg ; and Hilary had been obliged to use a certain amount for the expenses of her mother's funeral and of her own illness. When she had taken her ticket to London, and satisfied all her creditors, she had twenty pounds left. In October she would receive another ten pounds—the half-

yearly interest on her little capital. So she had two problems to solve: How could she keep body and soul together for eight months' on thirty pounds? And what could she do to secure an equally splendid income for the following year? Her old vision of a two-pound country cottage had come up, and been rejected as unworthy of her youth and energy. She must try to earn her bread; besides, no arithmetic had convinced her that, even in a cottage, she could exist for fifty-two long weeks on twenty pounds. No doubt, many people did, but she had not been born among them. She supposed that such an income would bring real comfort to an Indian ryot, or even to one of Miss Barlow's Irish peasants. But when she tried to live on rice or potatoes she got ill. Her experiments of this kind not only ended in failure, but were excessively uncomfortable.

Hilary had not written to any of her old friends. The life before her was so untried and strange that she felt inclined to see how it worked before inviting anyone to a private view. She could not ask girls of her own age, who lived with their parents in pleasant homes, to come and eat bread and dripping with her in an attic. She expected to live a good deal on bread and dripping. It is possible that you will not have much sympathy with Hilary's plans and fears. You may have come across people with less than twenty pounds in their pockets, and with no firmer hold on the future than hers; people who, nevertheless, made solid meals when they were hungry, and changed a sovereign without a pang. And if you have always lived safe and sheltered in a comfortable home, you will not understand how forlorn and anxious the girl felt. You have never been obliged to consider how costly are the bare necessities of life, how imperious our bodily demands from hour to hour. Hilary meant to live in London on fifteen shillings a week. If she succeeded, twenty-five pounds would last her nearly eight months, and she would still have a five-pound note for an emergency. With her ideas of London

prices, the prospect was not exhilarating. Unless she found work at once she would soon be half-starved ; and food is not the only pressing need to a person of nice habits. In London it costs money to keep warm and clean.

The only person in London who expected Hilary was a former maid, married to a flourishing greengrocer in Bloomsbury. As the expense of an hotel, even for a night or two, was out of question, she had written to this woman and asked her to recommend a respectable room. By return of post she had received a cordial invitation to stay with Mrs. Wilkins and look out for a room at leisure. Hilary gladly accepted the offer for a single night. But when she got there she found it very difficult to make the greengrocer's wife understand the real state of affairs. Mrs. Wilkins had never heard of a young lady wishing to live like a work girl in a cheap room with no one to "do" for her. Since Miss Nell had married a rich gentleman, surely she would not let her sister want for anything. It was finally the greengrocer himself who came to the rescue. He said he had a widowed aunt in reduced circumstances who lived just out of the Tottenham Court Road and took in lodgers. A very respectable young woman, a dressmaker by trade, occupied her first floor, but a young lady in the drapery line had lately left, having bettered herself by going to a house where all the hands slept on the premises.

Hilary jumped at this opportunity, and went off at once to look at the room. She was taken to an attic on the top of a small house in one of those streets where all the children play out of doors: On wet days, when the organ-grinders and the children stay at home, the street was a quiet one. Hilary thought that if she could have spent five pounds on the room, she might have made it quite engaging. With a clean yellow paper and white paint, a bit of blue felt and a dozen yards of the right cretonne, no one need mind coming home there. But the idea of living in it as it was appalled her. The boards cried out for a scrub ; the

strip of carpet had lost all color; the counterpane had evidently weathered the winter fogs; the wall paper had perhaps been lavender many years ago. Patches of it here and there were altogether missing. The painted chest of drawers blocked the only window, and served as a dressing table. The solitary chair was a cane one, with an imperfect seat. The landlady explained that Hilary's predecessor had come back late at night from her work, and had gone straight to bed. Sundays she used to spend out with friends. For the room, without attendance, she had paid four shillings a week. Hilary agreed to these terms, and engaged the room from the morrow. She could not expect to find anything better unless she paid more for it, and she considered it worth something to feel sure that the house was a quiet, respectable one. Mrs. Wilkins had said a great deal to her about the necessity of being careful where she pitched her tent.

When she got there on the following afternoon the place looked rather tidier. A clean though ragged short blind had been stretched across the window on a tape. Everything had been dusted, and a small Pembroke table added to the furniture. Mrs. Wilkins had insisted on lending Hilary an easy-chair, and she had advised the young lady to buy a kettle, a small petroleum stove, a frying-pan, and about a dozen other odds and ends that, even in an attic, are necessary to housekeeping—because Hilary had undertaken to wait entirely on herself. Mrs. Wilkins supposed she would have most of her meals at Shoolbred's, and reminded her that she could not go there on Sundays. Hilary said she had thought of that. Altogether, her inauguration cost her over a pound, and the first thing she did when she was left to herself was to reckon how much less than fifteen shillings a week she must spend in order that thirteen pounds ten should last her till October. She felt sure that a good deal of it would be needed for fees to registry offices, fares, and clothes. She might find something in her trunks to sell, if the worst came to the worst; and, of course,

rather than starve she would apply for help to Herr Hansen. But she hoped she would not be driven to that. It exasperated her to find everyone take for granted that she would sit down supinely and exist on his bounty. The most arduous life would be more respectable.

That first evening Hilary was too much occupied to feel dejected. She had her purchases to unpack and stow away, and her two huge trunks to overhaul. In one of them she found the delicate table and bed linen saved by her mother from the wreck of their home. Part of this she took out for daily use. Then she unpacked her books and the few clothes fit for her present surroundings. One of the two trunks was nearly full of useless clothes, and she wondered whether she would be able to sell them for sums that would supply her with necessaries. She had a white satin ball-gown, and not one pair of strong boots; she had white ostrich feathers, and no tidy dark gloves; the yellow gauze she had worn at their own dance was as good as new, while her everyday serge had looked shabby months ago. Of course, if she soon found well-paid work, she might still be glad of her pretty things. She would not barter them for pence yet awhile. If she began to earn enough to live on, she could do like the young lady in the drapery line, and visit her friends on Sundays. Could she ever go for a walk with Dick again? From her own home it is so easy for a girl to brave Mrs. Grundy, but when once she is really shelterless, it behooves her to be careful. Nevertheless, Hilary thought that if Dick considered it all right—when would he be back from New York, she wondered. He had never answered her letter announcing Mrs. Frere's death, so she took for granted he was still away. The wild hyacinths would soon be out in the Surrey woods. If he wanted her to go and see them, how could she say him nay? But suppose he did not write until after his visit to Hamburg in May, and then proclaimed his engagement to Olga Werner. Such things happened,

and people had to grind at life just the same, having breakfast, tea, and dinner every day—earning them painfully, if they were poor. Would it be worth while to live year after year in such a room as this, spending the light hours in drudgery, and the dark ones stupidly asleep? Luckily, when you are very poor and very unhappy, your instinct is to live from hour to hour, not to dwell much on a future that only threatens. Hilary threw open her window, and listened to the evening bells. The greengrocer had given her a bunch of wallflowers that filled the air with spring. Even here the sparrows chirped and twittered sociably. The girl envied them. She hankered after the sound of a friendly voice, the sight of a familiar face. It made her melancholy to be quite alone. Well, then—she must be melancholy until the wiser mood arrived in its turn. Meanwhile she would brew herself a cup of tea.

Next morning it was very odd to wake and remember gradually that no one would bring her hot water, or even get her breakfast ready. She made her own bed, and tidied the room while the water boiled for her tea. With the help of Mrs. Wilkins she had moved the chest of drawers and put the table in front of the window. She had nothing for breakfast but tea and bread and butter. She meant to spend five shillings a week on food, and not a penny more. She reckoned that she could afford half a crown out of this sum for meat, vegetables, and puddings. She had often read descriptions of the purchases made by people who lived on still less; and, of course, she knew that at this very moment there must be thousands solving the problem she found so difficult. She wished she could remember more details. She had an impression that she ought to be eating dripping instead of butter; she must find her landlady and ask where she could buy dripping. Perhaps, when she had more experience, she would look on butter as an unattainable luxury, like peaches or champagne. She wished she knew a little more about those nutritious and

toothsome dishes that can be prepared at the cost of a halfpenny per head, and which philanthropists are always recommending to our improvident lower classes. What was pease pudding? Could she swallow tripe if she bought it at a cook shop? Dickens makes people eat pettitoes. What were pettitoes? Her only idea had been to buy one mutton chop every day; but when she went out after breakfast and found that a fat bony one cost eightpence, she began to cast about for cheaper and more satisfying meals. However, she had other important matters to think of first. She had bought the day's *Times* as well as the chop, and when she got home she sat down to look at the scholastic advertisements. Several promising ones met her eye. One offered eighty pounds to a young lady who could teach French and music to a child of twelve; another offered rather less for German and elementary Latin. Hilary copied down several addresses, all in the neighborhood of Regent Street and Oxford Street, and when she had eaten her chop she sallied forth and hunted out the first one. To her surprise she found herself at the doors of an inquiry office. She went in.

Her experience is hardly worth mentioning, it was so common. The post she inquired after had just been given away to a young lady of great attainments; but if Hilary would pay five shillings, and put her name down in the office books, she would shortly hear of something equally to her advantage. In fact, the sharp-looking female in authority hinted that she knew of several excellent openings from which the young lady could choose—when she had paid her five shillings. Hilary spent fifteen shillings in fees that afternoon. Every advertisement that had attracted her had been put in by an inquiry office, and by an odd series of accidents every vacancy described had just been filled. Some of the offices took five shillings, others only half a crown, but they all promised to send Hilary just what she wanted in the course of a few days. She walked home tired, sober, and hope-

ful. She had taken the first steps that day toward an honorable independence. On the strength of it she bought two halfpenny oranges to eat for supper. The dusts of the streets had made her very thirsty.

At the end of a fortnight Hilary knew more than she had done before about certain inquiry offices, and she had largely increased her acquaintance with remote London suburbs. But the honorable independence was still to win. From three out of the four offices to which she had paid fees she never even got the chance of work. She called over and over again, and was received at first with affable indifference, that soured a little as time went on, and in one instance turned to unpleasant bluster. Her persistence, they hinted, had long ago worn out her halfcrown. They did not care to recommend young persons who had neither experience nor certificates. Hilary did not look like a governess. There was a something about her. Would she consent to train for the ballet? They knew a gentleman who taught skirt-dancing in twelve lessons. Hilary did not pester that office again, and when she got home she looked in the glass to find out what the "something about her," was that stood in her way. Her plain sailor hat suited her. Perhaps she had better buy a cheap dowdy bonnet. Her hair would glitter and blow into feathery little curls, however well she brushed it. Though her jacket had been bought last year, it still looked modish and well cut. But her frock and boots and gloves were painfully shabby. Surely they matched her quest. When it grew hotter still she would be obliged to go about without her jacket. But then she would look more girlish than ever.

At another office they seemed to bear her a grudge because she wished to teach and not to cook. They said that all day long they were besieged by prayers for cooks—plains, generals, soups and jellies, any kind and price of cook. If Hilary would spend a year at one of the cookery schools and come back at

the end of it they could promise her twenty pounds a year and all found. If she had not been a lady, they could have promised more. Hilary reminded them that they had promised her the work she wanted before they took her fee.

The first office she had entered was not a mere robber's den. The superintendent sent Hilary hither and thither, and it was not her fault that the girl came away unhired. In each case her inexperience made her impossible. Not that the good ladies she saw in various suburban drawing rooms attached any value to real training. They would have stared if you had told them that a teacher ought, by rights, to be trained as carefully as a nurse or a cook. It was a mere superstition that stood in Hilary's way. If only she had been "out" for a month, she would easily have secured one of the posts now denied to her. She got quite hardened in time; learned to insist on her own merits, to lay stress on her accomplishments, even to offer her services on trial gratis, like an advertised sewing machine. But the weeks went on, the summer came, and her sense of failure grew more sickening every day. She did not know what to do. Of course a girl with more enterprise, with more knowledge of the world, would probably have forced her way in somewhere. Hilary took a rebuff. When people said they did not want her she turned dejectedly away, instead of convincing them that they were mistaken. And sundry small adventures had made her more timid than she had been before. A girl fresh from home and from the conventual shelter of a college knows so little of the ugly side of life. The least brush of it gives alarm. In the course of her wanderings Hilary had come across a burlesque actress who offered her a brandy and soda, and told her she was a fool to teach brats when she had just the figure for tights. She should interview the manager of the Cytherean, and show him how high she could kick. On another occasion she had answered an advertisement for a lady housekeeper,

and found that the sole inmate of a shabby-genteel house was an elderly man, who wished to engage her on the spot. She fled.

When the only active office tired of trying to help her, she went to call on some of her old friends. Nothing came of it. The good-natured ones asked her to dinner, and insisted on calling a cab to take her home. At least this happened once, and it cost her two shillings. She could not afford the risk again. When she told the hostess and her daughters that she wished to go out as a governess, they smiled and promised to remember it. Everyone promised to let her know directly anything nice and suitable offered. And the weeks went by—burning, hot, dusty, difficult to fill. The little attic felt baked and airless by night as well as by day. No food within her means could tempt her appetite. She grew weak and white and hollow-eyed. Very soon she would have to change her last five-pound note but one. She often dreamed of the sea.

Lately she sometimes spent the hottest days in Regent's Park, hating the long, inactive hours, and yet not knowing how to make them busy. She wondered whether Dick had come back from New York yet. He had never written. Suppose he had died out there? The mere notion cost Hilary a pang, and taught her how far the hope of seeing Dick sustained her. The picture of him either dead or married gave her intolerable pain.

One evening, toward the end of July, she took a book into the Park, and found a quiet bench near the south end of the Broad Walk. For a long time she did not attempt to read. She felt disconsolate and dull. The life she had led of late affected her spirits. She longed for companionship, and for the habits that turned out to be as necessary to her well-being as the air she breathed. She felt choked with heat, lonely, and half-starved. Sometimes her miseries seemed self-created, because at any moment a begging letter to her rich brother-in-law would have

ended them. There is no doubt that with the hospital or the workhouse staring her in the face, she would have asked him to save her from either. And, inasmuch as she could depend on him if the worst came to the worst, she knew herself to be more fortunate than many women just as softly bred. But she could not bring herself to say to Herr Hansen that, because he had married her sister out of compassion, he must support her in ease and idleness. She might still be driven to make the appeal, but even now, when everything ahead looked gloomy, she vowed she would put off the humiliating day as long as she could. When she came to her last penny she might find it easier to beg.

Nell evidently no more understood her sister's difficulties than the princess understood what famine meant when she asked why the starving peasants did not eat cake. Nell's letters were airy, full of herself, and quite uncomprehending. She wondered why Hilary had kept some of the trousseau money for her own needs, and even hinted that, being in Paris, she might have found a use for it herself. Her last letter bore a Paris postmark. Hilary took it out of her pocket and looked down the pages again.

"I suppose you're enjoying yourself [it began]. You always did hanker after a bachelor life and your own latchkey. Fritz is rather shocked. I tell him you're in a real lively set by this time, all living in the same way, and frisking about the town from morning till night. I suppose you give each other little dinners and suppers. Where *do* you grub? I told Fritz you probably had lunch at the Savoy, and supper at the Continental. It does him good to think so, even if it isn't true. I dare say Shoolbred is good enough for you, as a rule. You'll find Fritz improved. I don't let him tuck his napkin in his waistcoat, and he's had his hair cut. But the other day he asked me to fetch him his pipe. I did laugh.

I have just sent you a box of early peaches. How can you keep cool in London now? I am wearing nothing but white, with a touch of black about it. I am buying any amount of new clothes here. I don't like the things I got in Hamburg. Besides, they are colored. I should like to have a week's lark with you. Could you put me up? Do you ever see the Theodores or Dick Lorimer?"

Hilary had only received the letter that morning, and she meant to write in a day or two and explain that she could not put Nell up. She had pulled it out just now to look at Dick Lorimer's name again. He seemed to have vanished out of her life lately. She did not even know whether he was in England or America, or whether he had ever received her letter announcing her mother's death. Many a time, since she had been back, some stranger with a chance resemblance to him had startled and then disappointed her. When she left Hamburg she had looked forward to seeing him soon after she arrived, and she knew that, with him in London, she would never have reached her present pitch of forlornness. Her hunger for a glimpse of him did not die out as time went on. It seemed to grow worse as her difficulties thickened. What he would do to help her she did not know, but only that the mere sound of his voice would give her pleasure. His image often filled her mind now, and her thoughts wandered back to the days when he was with her. The city seemed empty without him. She watched for him continually, and missed him more despondently every hour.

This evening, as she sat in the Park, she made up her mind that she would write to his office again, and tell him that she had come back to London. Even if he was in Australia, she supposed that letters must be sent on to him by his managing clerk. She did not know his present private address. How like him that young man was at a little distance beyond those laurels! He wore a light, long greatcoat over even-

ing clothes. He walked like Dick. He had a mustache and dark eyes and an alert air. He came this way, and every step brought him more within view. *It was Dick!* Hilary rose to her feet with a throb of glad recognition, just as he turned down a sidepath that led more quickly out of the Park. She set off at a brisk pace to follow him.

But Dick outstripped her. He walked hard, like a man in a hurry, and Hilary encountered obstacles on the way. The path swarmed with children and perambulators to-night, and every one of them helped to hinder her tiresomely from overtaking Dick. Once she lost sight of him. Then she saw him pass out of the gates, and by the time she came within a hundred yards of them he had hailed a hansom and jumped into it. If only she could have shouted or whistled ! But there were so many people about, and even now some stared at her hot haste. She had run a little way, and felt rather panting and disheveled already. And Dick *would* stare stupidly in front of him and not give one glance back. She knew now that her letter would reach him, and that should have been a consolation. But for to-day she had missed him, and that grieved her. Besides, she felt as if she had given chase to a young man and beheld him drive away. This was unreasonable. Nevertheless, as she slackened and turned homeward, her eyes were full of tears. It was the second time that she had seen Dick and been unable to accost him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WHITE ELEPHANT.

HILARY walked back very slowly. She had to make her way through noisy streets, more hideous perhaps in midsummer than at any other season. The pavement was strewn with bits of paper and stale vegetable refuse. Dust lay thick on the flags and choked the stale, hot air. The only tempting things in sight were the strawberries heaped on barrows, but even these at the end of the day looked flabby, so many hours had passed since they had been gathered from the shade of their own leaves. Hilary, however, could not resist them. She had eaten nothing that day but some brown bread and marmalade. She bought a pound, and resolved to do without meat on the morrow to make up for it. She wondered where Dick would dine that night. When she got to the street in which she lived it seemed even less inviting than usual. A barrel organ was grinding out the last music-hall melody, and two or three slatternly juvenile couples were jigging up and down to it. The cat's-meat man was plying his trade, and a dealer in rags and bones went from house to house, and bargained long and loudly with the housewives, most of whom on this hot evening set open the front door, and sought air on the door-step.

Hilary let herself in with a latchkey and walked heavily upstairs, pursued by the vile jingle of the barrel organ and the yell of the cat's-meat man. To her surprise, as she got near her own room, she heard someone moving inside, and when she opened the door she stood still on the threshold in amazement, unable for a moment to believe her eyes. There, on

the edge of a chair, with a face of injured disgust, sat Nell, a dressing-bag as big as a trunk at her feet, and a trunk as big as a furniture van filling up the floor.

"Nell!" cried her sister, and said nothing else for some time. The two girls had not met since Nell's wedding eve, since Mrs. Frere's death. Nell's flip-pant letters were not an exhaustive index to her mind. What she had left unwritten her tears and smiles said now.

"How do you come here?" asked Hilary at last. "Where is Herr Hansen?"

"I have been here for an hour," replied Nell. "If you had kept me waiting another five minutes, I should have gone to the Métropole. What a hole this is! You don't mean to say you sleep in that bed?"

"I do."

"But where do you have your meals? Where is your sitting room?"

"This is the only room I have."

"Good Heavens!" said Nell. "What do you think you gain by living in a pigsty like this? You *look* as if you had just walked out of a hospital."

"I can't afford anything better."

"But you had about a hundred pounds of mine, and you have five hundred of your own."

"When I came to London I had twenty pounds. I cannot touch my capital till I'm twenty-five—you know that, Nell. I have lived in this room for twelve weeks, and only spent eleven pounds, and two of those went for fees and pots and pans."

The real difficulty of accomplishing such a feat did not reach Nell's comprehension. She said, "I call that a good deal to spend in such a hole as this. They ought to pay you to inhabit it. Can they cook?"

"I do my own cooking and cleaning," said Hilary.

"It looks like it," said Nell.

"Where is Herr Hansen?" inquired Hilary for the second time.

"I have no idea."

"You don't mean to say you have come by yourself?"

"That's it."

Hilary looked at her sister in search of further lights, and she discovered that Nell felt more uneasy than her words would admit.

"Did he like you to travel alone?" asked Hilary.

"We've had a row," explained Nell. "He had to go to Lyons on business, and he didn't want to leave me alone in Paris."

"Quite right."

"Well! You needn't talk. I didn't want to go and live by myself in a hovel. I merely wished to wait at our hotel, instead of traveling back to Hamburg with some of his frumpish friends."

"Why couldn't you go to Lyons with him?"

"He doesn't stay there. He has to fly round in country districts, and he meant to travel by night—a good deal. He said it would be too rough and too tiring for me. He thinks I'm in Hamburg by this time. He'll be surprised when I write from London."

"Won't he be angry?"

"Probably. I must write to-night. What address shall I give? I can't stay here. I have a good mind to go to an hotel."

"No, don't do that," persuaded her sister. "I am sure your husband would not like it. He can't so very much mind your coming to see me."

"I should think not, indeed," said Nell.

Hilary, while she talked, had taken off her hat and gloves, and put a cloth and some tea-things on the little table. Nell observed her closely.

"What have you done to yourself?" she said, with growing discontent. "You look *old* and starved. What were you going to have for supper?"

Hilary exhibited her bag of strawberries. On the table there was half of a twopenny loaf.

"Well! what else? Where's the butter? Where's the meat? Where's the wine?"

"If you want all those, you must go and buy them," said her sister.

"My stars!" said Nell. "This is worse than at Aunt Bertha's."

"London is dearer than Hamburg, and I only spend five shillings a week on food. It is quite enough, Nell. I assure you, I don't starve. The women who make shirts at so much a gross—or button-holes—they can only afford——"

"What time does Shoolbred close?" interrupted Nell. "I want my dinner. If they are shut up, we must go somewhere else. I'll pay for us both. Be quick! We had a rough crossing, and I feel as if I had lived on button-holes for a week."

"Have you much money with you?"

"None—about ten pounds. To tell you the truth, when I came away I thought I was coming for good, and I left some of my money behind. It seemed more dignified, and I was in such a rage. Of course, I expected to find you living in decent lodgings. I can't stand this sort of thing. Fritz must fetch me back at once."

"I never heard of such behavior," said Hilary severely. "You can't run away from your husband one day and run back again the next. No man will stand being treated like that."

"What do you know about it?" asked Nell, going to the glass to arrange her veil. "Fritz will stand anything from me."

"You certainly wrote as if you were happy, and you look well."

"I feel ill in this room. Where am I to sleep? Where can I put my clothes? Shall we go into decent lodgings to-night? There are plenty near here."

Hilary hesitated.

"No," she said. "Herr Hansen may wish you to leave at once, or he may refuse to send you more money as you came off in this headlong way. Put up with a room here until he writes."

"What do you think of my gown?" said Nell incon-

sequently. "Poor mamma! I never buy a new one without thinking of her. I like spending money, you know, just as she did. You never cared about clothes."

"That's nonsense," said Hilary. "I am as fond as you are of nice frocks. You always think that if one does without anything it is a sign of indifference to it. Do you suppose I enjoy living up here on five shillings a week?"

Somehow Nell's return made it look a miserable and rather ridiculous life. The sordid details of it crowded across Hilary's mind as she watched her sister's elegant figure, and listened to the rustle of silk as she moved. Even for three or four days could she keep this dainty young woman content here? Who would wait on her, tidy after her, bring her tea in the morning when she woke? But it did Hilary good to see her sister again, and to be carried back to the old way of life, even for a little while and incompletely. She enjoyed her dinner at Shoolbred's all the more because Nell ordered champagne with it.

"Your ten pounds won't last long," said Hilary, when her sister had paid the bill, and given the waiter twice as much as he expected for a tip. She tried to persuade Nell to go home in an omnibus. They were both too tired to walk. But Nell hailed a hansom, and said it was extravagant to take an omnibus, because, whenever you did, you got measles or scarlet fever and had to pay for doctors and new wall papers. Hilary had always been penny wise and pound foolish.

It was midnight before they went to bed. Nell would sit in Hilary's room, candle in hand, and make little rushes into her own in search of cockroaches and worse. But at last she allowed herself to be persuaded that she had seen the worst by daylight. Next morning Hilary got up early and went out shopping. By nine o'clock she carried quite a comfortable little breakfast tray into her sister's room.

"I can't think what you do all day," said Nell, sitting up and pouring out her tea. "How do you amuse yourself?"

"By looking for work that I can't get."

"Then what's the use of looking for it? Have you seen the Theodores?"

"No. I don't want to."

"I do. I've brought clothes on purpose. Open that trunk, Hilary. The big black hat is for you. They wear the feathers sticking up like that in Paris. You must have one of my gowns too, and some boots and gloves. I never saw such a scarecrow as you are in that ragged old serge. It is not ladylike. And your hair is wrong. You can't wear it that way now."

"But, my dear girl," said Hilary, a few hours later, when she had put on some of her sister's things, "I can't go after a situation as daily governess dressed like this."

Nevertheless she found the sensation of being well dressed again an exceedingly pleasant one. She felt for the moment as if she had cast away many of her troubles with her rags. In the afternoon they went to call on Mrs. Theodore. Nell had taken the utmost pains with her toilet, and as she was shown into the drawing room her hostess saw at a glance that Paris had turned her out from the shape of her bonnet to the fit of her boots and gloves. Both sisters were in black. Mrs. Theodore described their visit to her husband that evening while they were waiting for dinner.

"Somehow," she said, "I never thought of those girls as still in existence. I supposed them gone under—submerged. I knew Nell had married a fat German, but a marriage like that hardly counts, does it? At any rate, when she sailed in to-day, dressed like a French duchess, I didn't know her for a moment. I recognized Hilary first. She is in a consumption, otherwise she has not altered much. But Nell has blossomed into a beauty. She has the manner, the air—it is an indescribable change. You must see her. She sat down next to poor dear Sophia and inquired kindly after Arthur. You should have heard her. Really, with her complexion, Sophia might know

better than to wear that brutal blue. I was quite ashamed of her. But I can't make those girls out altogether. Why does Hilary look so queer? and they gave me no address. They are to dine here next Tuesday. Herr Hansen, too, if he has arrived. Nell expects him, she says. Is he really well off?"

"Rather!" said Mr. Theodore. "Wish we had half his income."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Theodore meditatively. "Then Nell will not be ruined in a year."

Nell felt pleased with the impression she had made, which shows that she had a little mind. But she said that going back to the attic was like sitting on a cinder heap after supping in a palace. She proposed that they should dine out again.

"Your money will soon be gone at this rate," objected her sister; for Nell had bought twenty things she did not need already to-day.

"But you have some left," said Nell.

"Yes, but I cannot squander it as you do."

"You can lend it to me, and I'll pay you back."

"I've been inclined to think my life a hard one," observed Hilary. "But I see it might have been a good deal harder. If you had been with me, we should both have gone to the workhouse long since."

"You're such a croaker! Look at me! I take things as they come and enjoy myself, and I get all I want."

"As it happens, you do. But I suppose other folks have to provide it for you. I can't imagine a world peopled by women with nothing to do but dress and amuse themselves."

"I don't want to imagine it. The world as it is suits me very well."

"Then you don't regret having asked Herr Hansen to marry you?"

"Not since I have paid this visit to you," said Nell, with an expressive glance round the room.

"Shall you wear your wedding gown next Tuesday?"

Hilary really felt less curious about the gown than about Nell's views with regard to Arthur Preston. The chances were that they would meet him on Tuesday at the Theodores'. Nell guessed at the thought in her sister's mind.

"I shall wear a new black moiré," she said. "It suits me better than my wedding gown."

"Poor dear Sophia!" thought Hilary; but, on the whole, she felt reassured. Nell looked for the postman with anxiety, and her eyes twinkled mischievously when she spoke of the dinner on Tuesday. Evidently time, absence, and marriage had mended her heart. The old breakage had not even left a tender place.

They dined quite early that day, because, after a makeshift lunch in their own rooms, Nell vowed that she was starving. When they had finished and come out again into broad daylight, she proposed that they should walk across Regent's Park and look at their old home. Hilary hardly felt up to it, and said so; but that only induced Nell to hail a hansom and get driven there. She reminded her sister that it was the anniversary of their dance a year ago. Hilary had remembered it all day. She would not be able to sit in the summer house to-night and talk to Dick, while the moon rose above the elms. Strangers sat within the gates where her father and mother used to make a sheltered place for their children. She had never felt inclined to attempt the pilgrimage by herself and stand outside her home. To-night Nell came with her, and that made a difference. Nevertheless, the sisters turned away rather sadly when they had lingered for a minute or two at the front gate. The white lilac had been cut down. The garden beds were filled with formal rows of geraniums and lobelias. All the blinds were new and ugly. A gaudy flower-pot stood on a round table in the library window. On the gate post a new name was painted instead of the number that had contented the Freres. The little villa, with its bit of garden behind, was now called "Broadlands."

"Come away," said Nell, "we have seen enough." They had dismissed their cab and began to walk slowly toward the end of the road. But they had not left their old home twenty yards behind them when Nell cried suddenly, "There is Dick Lorimer on the other side. I saw his face as he came out of the house. I should like to speak to him."

"So should I," said Hilary.

Something unusual in her voice caught Nell's quick ear—a note of excitement that she struggled to suppress. She did not quicken her own pace, but it was with a thrill of pleasure that she watched Nell cross the road at a run. Dick turned as she overtook him, and from where she stood Hilary could see his face light up with pleasure and surprise. The moment after he had shaken hands with Nell he came eagerly toward her, and for some minutes the three old friends stood in the middle of the road and tried there and then to bridge the gaps made by months of silence and separation. Where had Dick been? Why had he never written? How was it that the sisters were in London by themselves? Their address at once! Unfortunately Dick had to go off to Manchester tomorrow, but he would be back in a week. A business man without a partner was, as they knew, a slave.

"Do you still live near here?" asked Nell at last. "Can't we come in and see you for half an hour?"

"Certainly," said Dick, glancing at Hilary in doubt of her approval. He saw her hesitate.

"Or I will walk back with you," he suggested.

"I can't talk out of doors," said Nell. "I want a chair and a cup of tea to set my tongue going. I'll chaperon you, Hilary. I'm a German matron, I am. You know I'm a German matron, don't you, Dick? *That* happened before you went to the Antipodes."

For Dick had explained that he had, after all, gone to New York in February, and from there to Australia. New business combinations had made the further journey desirable. In Australia he had been obliged to travel quickly, and it was not wonderful that many

of his letters had wandered round the world after him. He had only received the one announcing Mrs. Frere's death three days ago, and he had written at once to Frau Werner to ask for news of Hilary and Nell.

"Hilary looks very ill," whispered Dick, when some turn in their walk gave him the opportunity of speaking unheard to Nell.

"She has been starving in a garret for three months," said Nell.

"Great Scott! Why did you let her?"

"I didn't know."

There was no chance of saying more just then, because they had arrived at Dick's lodgings. He led the way to one of those empty-looking, heavily furnished dining rooms in which bachelors of his condition are content to spend some of their leisure hours; and, at Nell's request, he rang and ordered tea.

"Your sister says you have been back three months," he said, addressing Hilary, and looking at her with anxious, dissatisfied eyes. "Where are you staying?"

Hilary hesitated.

"Come and see, Dick," said Nell. "I invite you to tea. When do you get back from Manchester?"

"Wednesday. I could come rather late on Wednesday afternoon."

"How can we have people to tea, Nell?" said Hilary, in a voice of vexed remonstrance. "What are you thinking of?"

"You don't call me 'people,'" said Dick. "Is Herr Hansen with you?"

Nell laughed.

"Not exactly."

"When do you expect him?"

"Soon; or I shall go to the Métropole and send him the bill."

"It is not really so bad," said Hilary. "It is Nell who is spoiled. Plain living does not content her nowadays. But we cannot have you to tea, Dick."

"Where can we meet, then?"

Hilary considered, and could not answer. Mean-

while Nell wrote their address on a scrap of paper, and handed it to Dick with a flourish.

"I expect you on Wednesday afternoon," she said. "If Fritz comes and we move to the Métropole, I will let you know."

When the tea arrived Dick asked Hilary to pour it out. He got up to take his cup from her, and stood at her side as he drank it.

"What have you been doing all these months?" he asked. "You don't look fit."

"I've been looking for work," said Hilary wearily. "How do men manage to make a living, Dick?"

"Some don't."

"Poor things! And it lasts so long. Twenty-four hours in the day for every one of us, whether the time is full of pleasure or of pain."

Dick looked pityingly at the girl's thin, shadowy face, and Hilary felt as if she had spoken too directly out of her innermost heart, which was sorrowful. His silence only strengthened this impression, and, as if she desired to remove it, she got up now and began to look about the room. Her attention was caught by a little shelf of books in one corner, and she went up to them with a cry of recognition. There was her own old set of the Waverley Novels, her own old Shakspeare. Dick, then, had bought them at the sale. She turned to ask him, saw that he was speaking under his voice to Nell, and, with one volume in her hand, went still nearer to the window to get more light. Nell and she were going to the Lyceum on Saturday afternoon.

"Are you making your fortune, Dick?" Nell had said in a low tone, directly her sister wandered off.

"Not in your sense of the word," said Dick. "I could not afford such rings as you are wearing, but I can afford to marry."

"Happiness does not depend on money," remarked Nell sedately. "Are you going to be married, Dick? It is quite time."

"Quite time," he echoed.

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"You embarrass me, Nell. Have some more tea."

"Don't snub me, Dick. Confide in me."

"I don't mind telling you that the Australian journey has done it. Six months ago I could not have set up housekeeping."

"Housekeeping need not cost much," said Nell, "if you marry someone economical—like me."

"I want to marry someone—like you," said Dick. Nell's eyes met his in delighted inquiry, and then with understanding. For he smiled and nodded, and in his eyes there was a question too.

"You both look pleased," said Hilary, coming toward them. With Dick in the room, she had found it impossible to fix her attention closely on any printed page. She wanted to hear what he said, to look at him, to engage his interest.

"Have you heard some good news?" she asked in wonder, for she knew her sister's face, and she had never seen it better pleased.

"If I am not mistaken," said Dick.

"You're not mistaken," said Nell; "and I don't think I am."

Hilary said it was time to go home. She evidently thought them badly behaved to speak in enigmas that they refused to explain. So Nell said that she had been encouraging Dick to make a venture.

"A business venture?" asked Hilary, with uplifted eyebrows. "Don't trust her, Dick. She understands nothing but Paris fashions."

"I think you are unjust to her," said Dick. And as their cab drove off he lifted his hat and said, "Good-bye till Wednesday."

"I shall write and tell him not to come," declared Hilary.

"You goose!" said Nell.

Taken by themselves these words sound neither flattering nor explanatory, but they seemed to please Hilary, and she said nothing more about writing to put off Dick.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH OLD FRIENDS MEET.

"You only half believe it," said Nell next day, "and I hope Fritz will never find it out, but I really ran away from him. Luckily I didn't leave a letter to say so. What an idiot a woman who does that must be! She must often want to go back, just as I did the moment I saw this room and remembered I had no money."

"I hate to hear you talk as if you only valued Herr Hansen for his money," said Hilary. "Do you mean to say that, if someone left you a fortune, you would run away in good earnest?"

The sisters were sitting close to the open window in Hilary's room. They had spent three hot, tiring hours at the Academy, and when Nell got back she put herself into a white silk wrapper as quickly as possible and asked for tea. The water had been set to boil above a spirit-lamp that Nell said made the air smell of methylated spirit. So she had brought in a bottle of scent and a scent diffuser, from which she was lazily sending out a fine spray. The room soon began to smell of heliotrope.

"Why don't you call him Fritz?" she said, without looking at all annoyed by her sister's rebuke. "He is your brother now. No, I should not run away again, even if I had any money. I find I miss him."

"He is worth a dozen of you," said Hilary.

"Why doesn't he write? Why doesn't he come?"

"He is probably very angry."

"He may be, but I am his wife. He can't cast me off like an old coat."

"I wonder that argument didn't occur to you when you left Paris—ran away, as you call it."

"What shall I do if he goes back to Hamburg without me?"

"Go after him and ask his pardon."

"Hilary! You do change your mind! Not so long ago you would have said 'Stay here and lead a wide, free life full of thrills.' I suppose this *is* what you call a wide, free life?" inquired Nell, glancing round the garret.

Hilary was obliged just then to get up and attend to the spirit lamp.

"It is very inconvenient when a member of your own family runs away from her husband," she said, as she made the tea. "What is one to say to everyone if Herr Hansen doesn't soon turn up?"

"I hope he won't go back to Hamburg without me. He says that his housekeeper will fill all our rooms with flowers, and put devices over the doors—'Welcome to the young wife, and joy to the happy pair.' If she does, and he arrives by himself, he will feel so silly."

"I wonder if you make him happy?" said her sister.

"I have never asked myself the question. When we were first married I was wretched. Then I got that telegram about mamma and was so ill, and he was so good to me. I began to be fond of him about that time. We quarrel a great deal, though. I had such a business to get him to cut his hair, and wear English clothes, and not call me pet names in public."

"And what does he want you to do?"

"Take an interest in housekeeping. One of our worst rows was in the market at Milan. He was so shocked I didn't know the price of turnips, and I was so shocked that he did."

And so Nell would go on for a long time talking of her husband with a curious mixture of admiration, ridicule, and affection. That she felt uneasy at his silence no one could doubt who saw her watch for the

postman, and look deeply disappointed when he brought her nothing. When several days had gone by, Hilary began to wonder anxiously whether the breach could be a more serious one than she had at first supposed. But it rejoiced her to see signs of Nell's attachment to her husband—signs that her old sentiment for Arthur had worn itself out. Did this mean that her sister's nature was a shallow one, capable of fancy, but not of love? Surely not! If Arthur had proved brave and loyal, he might have counted on Nell to his dying day. But he had dealt her a cruel blow; for a time it had stunned her, and now she was holding up her head again. Why should she let it droop long for one proved unworthy? Some girls would have been shattered for life by such treatment, but natures so sensitive and difficult to heal are luckily rare. Nell belonged to the sane majority who suffer and get well again.

Nell had not known, until she left him, how completely her husband had won her heart. She had learned to recognize his generosity, to expect his devotion, even to find his company agreeable. Who else thought her chatter brilliant, and her caprices reprehensible but still endearing? He had the admirable habit of seeming constantly aware of her youth, her grace, her beauty. She missed his approving eyes. These long days and nights spent in a London garret oppressed her like a nightmare. She kicked against the ugliness of life in such an environment. She could not put up with the everlasting pinch and scrape. She would have moved, but she had sent Herr Hansen this address, and any day or hour might bring him to it. Besides, Hilary did not wish to move with her.

Hilary was getting very anxious about the lowness of their united funds. A week had passed now without a letter or a message from Herr Hansen. Suppose he never wrote again, or only after long and tedious negotiations? They would soon be in actual want; and yet the degree of economy desirable in such circumstances seemed out of Nell's reach—like a counsel of

perfection. If she made a cup of tea she put half a week's allowance into the pot; she used butter as if it was not a luxury; she bought expensive fruit and delicate provisions for every meal they ate at home. While her money lasted, she paid willingly enough nine times out of ten; but she seemed to think on the tenth occasion that Hilary might like to take her turn. And, in spirit, Hilary gladly did so. She hated profiting by comforts she refused to provide. But though she croaked from morning till night, and often felt scathed by her sister's scorn of her niggardly management, yet the money seemed to fly. At first she had not troubled greatly, had let Nell go her ways, had been dragged here and there in search of amusement and decent food. She had even enjoyed the first few days of vagabondage about London shops and picture galleries. After her grim months of penury and disappointment the easy hours had been a pleasant change. She only began to be frightened when she saw Nell's purse almost empty and her own threatened. She began to look for the postman as eagerly as her sister did; and when Nell had been with her a week she began to hunt for work again. She did not forget that Dick was coming to tea on Wednesday, but she could not reckon on what he would say; and, in any case, unless Herr Hansen came to their immediate assistance, her sister and she would soon be in a tight place. Hilary constantly looked forward to the morning when their last shilling had gone and Nell demanded her dinner. She supposed that Nell would pawn her dressing case and then her jewels; but she shrank from letting her sister take such a step as she would have shrunk from the threshold of a workhouse or a prison.

The day on which they were to dine at the Theodores' she got a letter from a registry office with the offer of a situation as mother's help.

"It is a clergyman's wife with seven children," she explained to Nell. "A comfortable home and ten pounds. No servant kept. I did not want to give

up this room, but I think I must. No one has offered me a home *and* ten pounds. With my own twenty I shall be quite well off."

"How can it be a comfortable home with seven children and no servant?" said Nell. "What rot! The woman wants a general servant for less wages than a real servant would take. Let her get a smudge from a reformatory. You can't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse, Hilary. How silly you must be to think you can!"

"I shall go and see her," said Hilary. "If she is very nice, I should not mind helping her."

She had to make her way to the uttermost ends of a remote suburb under a burning July sun. As she dragged back again in the early afternoon she felt dead beat, and when she got upstairs her white face frightened Nell.

"Lie down directly!" she cried. "I will make you some tea. You will look like a ghost to-night. Has it been worth while? I guess not, from your face."

"I don't know," said Hilary doubtfully. "I have not refused to go there. I have said I wanted a day to think it over."

"What were the people like?"

"Pigs," said Hilary concisely. "A slovenly little hole of a house that smelled of Irish stew, and had ragged oilcloth on the stairs. The man was in his dressing gown smoking a pipe, the woman was sewing dirty artificial roses into a dirty blond bonnet. He spoke with a strong Irish accent; she dropped her *h*'s. A farmer's son who has got ordained and married the tallow-chandler's daughter in his first provincial parish. But they have their caste prejudices like the rest of us. If I go there I am to have my meals by myself—in the kitchen."

"Why did you say you would think it over?" asked Nell, with indignation.

"Because no one else offers me even Irish stew in the kitchen."

Nell looked reflective, observed that it was nearly

time to dress for dinner, and went back to her own room, where she wrote a note to Dick Lorimer.

"DEAR DICK [she said]: Be sure and come to tea to-morrow. You used to have some influence with Hilary. She wants to go as general servant to a woman who drops her *h's* and has seven children. Persuade her to come and live with us in Hamburg."

As a matter of fact Nell had never asked her sister to live with her in Hamburg. She knew that Hilary would refuse, and she believed that in most cases it is better for newly married people to live by themselves. If she led Fritz the deuce of a life, she did not wish other folks to know it. As long as there were no lookers-on to pity him, he considered himself the happiest man in the world. But, in writing to Dick, she felt bound to speak as if her home was open to her sister. And Dick would not like the idea of another long separation.

Nell posted her letter, and then dressed herself with exceeding care. The sisters were the last to arrive at Mrs. Theodore's, and as Nell entered the room, with the stately air she had grown into since her marriage, the first person she saw was Arthur Preston. For a moment he hardly recognized Nell Frere in this elegant young woman. It was not only the Paris gown that made the difference. She looked taller than usual, she walked with a prouder carriage, she spoke with greater self-possession. But when, after speaking to her host and hostess, she glanced at Arthur and smiled, he came hastily forward. The sight of her turned his head.

"But where is Sophia?" she asked. "Surely you have brought Sophia."

"There she is," answered Arthur unwillingly, as Sophia appeared from another part of the drawing room. Where did she buy her gowns, he wondered, now that Mrs. Theodore had no hand in them? But he remembered. The one she wore to-night she had

picked up ready-made at a sale. She had owned that it was not her color, and not exactly her size, but it had been an undoubted bargain, and was described by the saleswoman as a Paris model. The worst atrocities in English shops are usually described in this way; so that if anyone believed what saleswomen say, Paris would often be in danger of losing her elegant reputation.

Both Hilary and Nell rather liked Sophia. They thought her clumsy, but good-natured. Assuredly Nell did not sit down beside her with any thought of giving people an opportunity of contrasting them—to Sophia's grievous disadvantage. But their juxtaposition did, in fact, stamp the contrast on the attention of everyone present, and no one saw it so strongly as Sophia's husband, because his sensitive marital vision saw with the combined eyes of the company. He had mated with Sophia, and he might have mated with Nell. At that moment even Sophia's thirty thousand pounds hardly consoled him.

"Well, Sophia," Nell was saying cheerfully, "we have not seen each other for a long time. I hope you are very happy—as I am."

"I'm all right," said Sophia, with a funny, harsh chuckle she meant for a smile. "How pretty you've grown, Nell! Much prettier than you used to be. You do your hair so well now. When you came in I hardly knew you."

Nell laughed, and got up at Mr. Theodore's invitation to go in to dinner on his arm. He behaved in quite a new way to Nell to-night, and amused her vastly. It was impossible to be too civil to a girl who had managed to marry Hansen, Bopp & Rössler, even if six months ago the same girl had been the daughter of a penniless man, and therefore of no consequence at all. Pretty young women do sometimes spring these embarrassing surprises on persons who have justifiably overlooked them. But it is the part of the man of the world to veer with skill. To the young woman the change of tactics must afford much

harmless amusement. Nell, at any rate, looked as if she enjoyed her dinner. Arthur Preston sat on her other side, and tried hard to fall back into their old tone of intimate, and rather sentimental understanding. He might as well have tried to warm his hands at an icicle. As the dinner progressed he began to look sullen.

When the ladies were by themselves in the drawing room Mrs. Theodore asked Nell where she had spent her honeymoon, and when it appeared that she had been in Italy and Switzerland for five months, someone remarked that her husband and she must have been very much in love with each other to want so long a time to themselves.

"I was ill for a long time," said Nell. "We were to have been at home again by the end of March."

"Shall you ever feel at home in Hamburg?" said Mrs. Theodore. "You used to say you did not like Germans."

"One's tastes change. I mean to like my husband's people."

"You used to like Arthur," croaked Sophia. She sometimes said things so clumsy and ill-timed that her sister-in-law set her down as half-witted.

"Did I?" said Nell sweetly. "But you would naturally think that of people."

"Oh! he told me. He wanted to marry you—before he saw so much of me, you know."

"Really!" said Nell.

"Are you going back to Germany with your sister?" said Mrs. Theodore abruptly to Hilary. "You look as if you wanted a change."

"I am going to stay in England," said Hilary.

"When do you expect Herr Hansen?"

"We do not know for certain."

"Does he write every day, as a devoted husband should?"

"No. Not every day."

Mrs. Theodore looked at Hilary curiously. She thought her manner a little odd, a little unwilling. She wondered whether anything could have gone

wrong already between Nell and her husband. It struck her as strange that Nell should be over here without him.

Presently the men came back to the drawing room, and Arthur went straight to a vacant chair near Nell, just as he would certainly have done a year ago.

"Last time I saw you, you wore white roses," he began sentimentally; "I thought of it directly I noticed those in your gown to-night. Did you remember it when you chose them?"

"No," said Nell lightly; "I nearly took white carnations instead."

"Women have such short memories."

"It is yours that fails you in this instance," said Nell, with a note of contemptuous indignation in her voice. It was the first time she had been roused to speak seriously that night. "The last time we met was when you came to say good-by after my father's death."

"I was not thinking of that occasion," said Arthur, "but of Mrs. Eller's dance. We danced all through the programme together."

"Did we? What bad manners! But your step used to suit mine. How is Mrs. Eller?"

"We suited each other in many ways," said Arthur, with a sigh. "I used to think so. I think so still. I have been very unhappy."

"It has not agreed badly with you. You look very well."

"I know what you mean. I'm getting beastly stout. I always feel sorry for people when I notice that about them. I say to myself, 'There goes another man whose life is a failure. He has lost all he cares most for, and the only thing left is to make the best of the lower material pleasures—poor chap!' So he gets stout, and people think he's all right; but I pity him. Don't you? Cakes and ale are not quite everything, are they?"

"They are a great consolation," said Nell, laughing.

A silence ensued, and then Arthur began to speak

again in his usual tone, which was jaunty, knowing, and derisive.

"I suppose you're tremendously rich and happy and all that."

"I suppose I am," said Nell contentedly.

"Your husband is a great deal older than you, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"I remember him, I think. He used to play the piano to your sister, and he was very particular about his dinner."

"He plays the piano to me now. I listen to him for hours. He is still very particular about his dinner. So am I."

"You have changed very much, then."

"Oh, yes! I have."

"I feel that more every moment," said Arthur gloomily. "You have changed, and I have not."

"I don't think you *have* altered very much," said Nell, and her eyes seemed to take his measure as they met his with a satirical glance. She got up as she spoke and went toward Sophia, who looked lonely.

"What have you been saying to Arthur?" inquired Mrs. Preston. "He looks so cross. I had no idea when I married him that he had such a bad temper. Did you ever find it out?"

"No," said Nell; "but then I never married him."

"I don't wonder you put him out of temper," said Mrs. Theodore to her sister-in-law. "You say such silly things."

Sophia stared placidly across the room, not at all uneasy or offended. She was quite satisfied with her ill-humored mate, and quite blind to his cavalier treatment of her.

"My wife tells me that you are going to live in town by yourself," said Mr. Theodore, strolling up to Hilary and sitting down near her. She thought, as she looked at him, that he was less agreeable than ever, and she determined that in future she would not

often find herself the guest of a man who roused her strong antipathy. His smile struck her as derisive, and, in words that were ostensibly harmless, he managed to convey a sneer. His tone to-night suggested that her intention of living by herself in Babylon outraged his notions of propriety. Probably it did. The propriety of men like Mr. Theodore is a sensitive plant.

"You will be quite the woman of the world," he continued. "I suppose you have your latchkey and your club."

"Mr. Theodore," said Hilary, acting on a sudden resolution, "I want to speak to you on a matter of business. Can I see you any time to-morrow?"

He stiffened at once.

"Certainly," he replied, after a moment's pause. "I can see you in my office at four, or here at half-past five, whichever you prefer."

"I will come to the office at four."

"I cannot imagine what business a young lady like you can have in her head, or what you can have to say in a merchant's office. I am very old-fashioned, you know. I consider that a woman's proper place is in the drawing room."

"But many women have no drawing rooms," objected Hilary; "what are they to do?"

"They are failures, and in all departments the failures don't count. You throw them away. They disappear."

"I think you are rather old-fashioned," said Hilary, getting up with the intention of bidding good-night to Mrs. Theodore. "You talk as if our fate depended on you and not on ourselves."

She crossed the room and approached her hostess, who got up to meet her. Nell rose too, of course, and so did one or two other people. Arthur Preston found himself for a moment at Nell's side again.

"May I come and see you?" he whispered.

"Oh, do!" she replied in a clear, cheerful voice. "I'm in a garret just now with Hilary. One of her

freaks. But when my husband comes I'll ask you and Sophia to tea."

"Thank you. That is just what I should like," he muttered savagely.

Nell was still standing in the center of the room, bidding good-by and making appointments with several people who wished to see her again, when a footman came in with a telegram, which he handed to her. She changed color, glanced quickly at Mrs. Theodore for permission to open it, and flushed with pleasure as she read the message.

"My husband arrives to-morrow," she explained, her eyes dancing and her voice happy. "But he says we must return to Hamburg at once. So all my engagements will come to nothing. I am sorry for that."

"But how does the telegram come here?" asked Mr. Theodore.

"I left word at our rooms where I was. I rather expected it," explained Nell. She bid good-by in earnest now, and as she shook hands with Arthur she said, "I'm sorry that tea party won't come off."

And next day Sophia confided to her sister-in-law that she sometimes thought people were right when they said Arthur was a bad-tempered man.

"How very well that girl has done for herself!" said Mrs. Theodore, speaking of Nell to her husband after their guests had gone; "much better than if she had married Arthur with his nasty temper and his extravagant, unbusinesslike ways. I began to think, though, that she had quarreled with her bread and butter, coming away by herself like that, and living in a hole and corner with Hilary. I suppose the telegram *was* from Herr Hansen?"

"Oh, yes, she's all right," growled Mr. Theodore. "Some people have luck they don't deserve. Talk of acquiring wealth without doing a stroke of work for it! What about poor women who marry moneyed men? And the airs they give themselves, and the coin they squander——"

He looked meditatively at his wife, and left his remarks unfinished. She took the diamond pins out of the lace on her bodice, and rang for her maid.

"Don't be unjust to us," she said blandly. "We have to put up with the men."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ARRIVAL, A DEPARTURE, AND A SURPRISE.

"He says I am to be at Charing Cross at half-past eleven to-morrow morning to meet him," began Nell, directly they were in the cab. "I shall take all my luggage with me, because he wants to start back at once by the Club train. Won't he be tired, racing over to London, and from London to Hamburg right on end? I wonder why he is in such a hurry?"

"What does he say exactly?" asked Hilary.

"He says—'Charing Cross, Wednesday morning, 11:30. Be there without fail. Must leave Wednesday, Club train.'"

"I wonder why he has not written?"

"I believe Mrs. Theodore thought there was something up. She inquired so much after him."

"Well," said Hilary, "it is not your fault if there is not something up, as you call it. I expect you will find that he is very angry."

"He can't be angry long—with me," said Nell.

"You're a minx," said her sister.

The girls were both in very good spirits that evening. Until her husband's telegram arrived Nell did not know how uneasy his ten days' silence had made her. The sense of relief was great when she read his message, and understood that she would be with him again twenty-four hours later.

"As long as you are not married at all, you are all right," she explained to Hilary. "But when once you are, you feel like a bird with one wing when your husband is away."

"I don't suppose the feeling is universal among married folk," objected Hilary. She felt as greatly

relieved as her sister; for to make fight against poverty with Nell by your side was like facing an armed foe with your hands bound. Ten days of it had almost exhausted her resources. She had the single five-pound note left that she had put by for an "emergency," and besides that about thirty shillings. Unless she went as mother's help to the seven children, she could not live on thirty shillings until October—for ten weeks, as she counted in her little pocket almanac. She might, of course, spend the five pounds, but she shrank from doing so. Suppose she fell suddenly ill and wanted medicines, doctors, luxuries in a hurry, before she could get help from her sister. She clung to her five pounds. To-morrow she meant to put her case strongly before Mr. Theodore, and urge him to advance her a small sum out of her own little fortune. Nell seemed to think there could be no difficulty about it, but on a matter of business she could not trust Nell. If she failed, if Mr. Theodore convinced her that the thing was impossible, she had made up her mind to eat Irish stew in the curate's kitchen; at any rate, to cook it there for the seven children. It would give her a roof to her head, a certain amount of food,—probably more than she had given herself of late,—and, most important of all, something in the shape of a testimonial with which to better herself shortly. By Christmas she might aspire to be a nursery governess, and perhaps a year later someone might trust her to teach children to write and read. Meanwhile, if she sat up at night, she could work at Russian. For her translation of the "Hecuba" she had not found a publisher, but she had seen in one of the women's journals that several women were being paid for translating stories from the Russian.

Nell seemed quite blind to her sister's difficulties. She evidently thought that her visit must have saved Hilary money, since she had paid for so many ices, strawberries, and cabs. How could anyone who liked living in this grubby, miserable way want money at all? You cannot believe that Diogenes in his tub had

weekly expenses. Besides, Dick Lorimer was coming to tea on Wednesday.

"Got any money?" she said next day, when her trunks were packed and they were just about to start.

"Not much," owned Hilary, thinking to herself that if Nell offered to give her a little she would not refuse it.

"Lend me what you have," said Nell, opening her purse and turning it upside down to show that it no longer held a sixpence. "I want to tip the old woman, and I suppose I may as well pay for my room, and I want to stop in Regent Street and get a dear little traveling hat that just matches my gown. I noticed it——"

"Nell," interrupted her sister, "if I lend it you, you *must* give it me back before you go."

"How much have you got?"

"Seven pounds ten, to last me till October."

"I should think it would last you till Christmas here."

"If I get behind-hand I must borrow from you, Nell."

Nell laughed, and held up her empty purse again.

"I'm always in that condition," she said. "We should have to ask Fritz."

"I don't want to do that," said Hilary.

"No," said Nell lightly. "Men hate being asked for money, don't they? You must get some of your own of course. It will last you much longer than you want it."

Nell's words, irresponsible and thoughtless as they were, strengthened Hilary in her resolve to struggle on alone. She would rather cook and sew for seven children than ask for help that would be unwillingly given.

The sisters drove together to Charing Cross, left Nell's luggage in the cloakroom, and then returned to Regent Street to buy the hat and various other necessities—such as a large box of American sweets, a new

mechanical toy, and a complete photographic collection of stage and society beauties with which Nell said she meant to discomfit the enemies of England in Hamburg. They had arranged that Nell only should meet her husband's train, while Hilary ordered lunch for all three in a private room at the Métropole.

"Now, look here, Nell," she said, as her sister parted from her, "you are not to run off with your husband and all my money. Remember I have none to pay the hotel bill. I should be put in prison. Swear you will turn up!"

Nell laughed, pulled off her glove, and presented Hilary with one of her diamond rings.

"I meant to give you this, anyhow," she said. "If I don't come back, you can sell it."

But half an hour later she did come back, followed by Herr Hansen; and Hilary thought she saw signs of victory in his manner. His face lightened as he greeted her.

"I am glad you were here to look after my runaway wife," he said.

"Well, she ran away to me," returned Hilary.

He shook his head.

"I never heard of a young lady doing such a thing—never! I make arrangements for her to travel with my good, respectable friends; we write to Hamburg to have everything ready; I give her money for the journey; I bid her good-by with great sorrow; I say to myself business is business, and ten days goes quickly; I arrive at Lyons and get no telegram from her and no letter next day. I telegraph to my friends and they reply, 'Your wife not in Hamburg. Gone to London.' I tell you, I was mad with anxiety. I did not know what to think for twenty-four hours. After all, I am not a handsome young fellow. Only after two days did I get her letter to say she was with you. For two days and two nights I did not know what had become of her. It was wicked."

"We have been very anxious all this time for a letter from you," said Hilary, who quite agreed with Herr

Hansen in his denunciation of Nell's conduct, but did not like to say so.

"I am glad to hear it," he answered dryly. "I thought it well that Nell, in her turn, should understand what it means to be anxious, so I did not write. Besides, I was too angry. I should have said what neither of us could forget. It is not well to write when one is angry. When I tell it in Hamburg, they will say that is what comes of marrying an English-woman."

"Why should we tell it in Hamburg?" asked Nell, who had listened to her husband very demurely, but with a dancing light in her eyes.

"It is true," said Herr Hansen; "we shall be saved the trouble. My friends will have told the whole story."

"Look here," said Nell, deftly strewing the table with her great parcel of photographs. "These be Englishwomen. I am going to put rows of them on my drawing-room walls."

Herr Hansen glanced at the collection as it had been shot out there in higgledy-piggledy confusion—peeresses, actresses, dancers, women of royal blood, society beauties, and beauties in no society at all. He took one between his fingers—the portrait of a corpulent burlesque actress dressed in tights—examined it with tolerant contempt, tore it in two, and threw it into the grate.

"You had better sort them," he said; "some are not fit for your eyes;" and, in spite of Nell's remonstrances, he picked out the most objectionable and tore them into little pieces.

It amused Hilary to watch him. He treated Nell as if she was the most precious and provoking creature in the world. Nothing he could give her was too good, and nothing he could say too severe. In some ways he seemed ready to slave for her, in others to lay down the law. She could not persuade him to stay on in London.

"It is time for us to get home, and for you to have

the charge of the house," he said. "You will find that there is something else to do in the world than to look in the glass and spend money, though what sort of housekeeping it will be—— Imagine," he continued to Hilary, "when we were at Montreux we took a villa and your sister had to order the meals. Then I discovered that she knew nothing a woman should know—nothing at all. One day she ordered enough for a dozen, and the next day I had to go hungry. She cannot even make coffee, or knit a stocking, or iron a shirt. Every day I received a fresh shock when I asked her about such things."

"I'm not going to iron your shirts and knit your socks," sniffed Nell. "I would if you were a railway porter on a pound a week—perhaps. But I mean to have the prettiest dinner table in Hamburg, and an English drawing room. I won't have artificial flowers, and I will have an English parlor maid."

"That is all very well," said Herr Hansen, looking at his young wife with admiration that belied his words; "we cannot eat the flowers and the parlor maid. In Hamburg when we sit down to dinner we are hungry."

"I owe Hilary seven pounds ten," said Nell, suddenly changing the subject. "Have you any English money, Fritz?"

"I can get some," he said, and when lunch arrived he gave the waiter a French banknote to exchange for him.

"You do not look very well," he resumed, observing his sister-in-law. "When are you coming to stay with us?"

"I don't know," said Hilary.

The husband and wife exchanged glances.

"You are sure that you have enough money to go on with?"

"I have not much," admitted Hilary; "but I am going to see Mr. Theodore this afternoon about getting more."

"Well, if there is any difficulty, you must let me

know. You are not a spendthrift like Nell, but without money one can't get on in London."

"Listen to him!" cried Nell. "I have not spent as much since we were married as he did on that row of pearls I wore last night. I buy a pound of sweets and some shilling photographs. He buys pearls."

"Nevertheless," maintained Herr Hansen, "you are the spendthrift, and not I. But I shall not let you ruin me."

And Hilary thought with great inward comfort that he would prove a man of his word. She saw them off by the Club train, and, as she stood on the platform, Nell chatted to her in the disconnected fashion usual on such occasions. Further back in the carriage, Herr Hansen tried to stow away the books and illustrated papers which his wife had bought from the newsboys.

"Mind you tell the woman with seven children to go to the devil," she recommended.

"Nell," warned her husband, "that gentleman at the door of the next carriage is a German, but he probably understands English."

In case he did not, Nell translated her remark word for word. Her husband shook his head.

"Any message to Aunt Bertha?" Nell asked.

"Shall you go and see her?" said Hilary, in surprise.

"Certainly not," decided Herr Hansen. "Besides, she has given me notice of removal. The house will soon be let to someone else."

"Give my love to Dick," shouted Nell, as the train steamed slowly out of the station.

Hilary walked to the City by way of the Strand, Fleet Street, and Ludgate Hill. She had not been in her father's office since his death, and when she was shown there by one of the clerks, the first thing she observed was that Mr. Frere's old writing table had been sent away. Mr. Theodore sat at a new one. He rose for a moment to receive her, and then finished a letter before he gave her further attention. When he had signed his name he turned in his chair and said:

"Has Herr Hansen come?"

"Yes; and gone again," replied Hilary.

"I suppose your sister has gone with him?"

"Naturally. He came to fetch her."

"I wonder you stayed behind. You cannot live here on twenty pounds a year, or will Herr Hansen make you an allowance?"

"I should not accept one unless I was ill or disabled," said Hilary.

"I suppose you have found some means of making money, then?"

"Not yet. I hope to soon."

"It isn't easy, as many women find out when they try. However, your sister's marriage is a great thing for you. Herr Hansen can afford anything."

"He hasn't married us both," said Hilary impatiently.

"I dare say he will find that he has—as far as money goes. What are you to do?"

"I want some of my own money until I can make enough to live on. I live on very little."

"Where is your own money?"

Hilary looked at him in amazement.

"You know best," said she. "I am talking of the five hundred pounds you have invested for me."

"That is trust money. We cannot touch it."

"I thought it might be managed somehow. I only want a little, and I would so much rather get at my own than take any from Herr Hansen. I cannot live on what I have till October."

"How much have you?"

"Seven pounds ten."

"That gives you more than ten shillings a week. What does a woman want with money?"

"I cannot live on it," repeated Hilary, her anger rising at his tone.

"I don't see what else you are to do unless you go to Hansen for more. It is not my place to give you money when you have a rich brother-in-law."

"I have not come here to beg, Mr. Theodore. What I want belongs to me."

"Oh! as to that," said Mr. Theodore nonchalantly, "you haven't a penny piece of your own. The seven pounds ten in your pocket belongs to Dick Lorimer by rights. So does the five hundred I have in trust. He paid for your sister's wedding clothes, really."

In this country we permit ourselves very little outward sign of having received a considerable mental shock. When a companion knocks down the fireirons some of us start and scowl, but none of us who are decently behaved make any visible ado when a word or two, spoken before spectators, shatters our lives. Hilary changed color, and said, after a short, quivering pause:

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know? He backed a bill for your father just before his death, a bill for two thousand pounds. Of course he had to meet it, as your father died bankrupt. How he has kept on his legs I don't know."

"We owe Mr. Lorimer two thousand pounds?"

"Not legally, perhaps; but still——"

"But—but did my mother know of this?"

"No. Lorimer would not have you told—didn't want to put you in the street, he said. But now that your sister has done so well for herself, I consider you ought to be told, and make what restitution you can. It's been precious hard on poor Lorimer."

"Has it made much difference to him?" asked Hilary, who had certainly turned rather white.

"Crippled him for years. Makes it quite impossible for him to marry, unless he gets put on to someone with money. Don't understand him doing it, myself. He must have known your father's affairs were in a bad way."

"Yes, I dare say you find it difficult to understand," said Hilary dreamily.

"I certainly shouldn't have done it myself, if that's what you mean," admitted Mr. Theodore. "In busi-

ness matters sentiment won't pay, as my fine fellow has found out by this time."

"Will there be any difficulty about paying the five hundred pounds in your possession to Mr. Lorimer?"

"Certainly. I hold it in trust for your benefit until you are twenty-five."

"But it belongs to Mr. Lorimer."

"Not at all. He signed a release. Do you suppose I didn't know enough to make myself safe?"

"I beg your pardon," said Hilary, smiling a little at his tone of indignation.

"Who *does* the money belong to now?" she asked, after a moment's further consideration.

"To the trustees until you are twenty-five. It's simple enough."

"And then I can pay it back to Mr. Lorimer."

"You can make ducks and drakes of it in any way you please when it's out of our hands and in yours."

Hilary got up, and Mr. Theodore accompanied her to the door.

"Lorimer will be down upon me for telling you," he remarked.

Hilary hurried downstairs without making any reply.

"I should keep the seven pounds ten, if I were you," Mr. Theodore called after her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT EVERY WISE MAN'S SON DOTH KNOW.

WHEN Dick saw the wretched little street in which Hilary had spent the last three months, he did not wonder that she looked pale and ill. He was earlier than his appointment, but he knocked at the door and asked if the sisters were at home. The untidy little girl who opened it stared hard at him, and said she did not know. She believed they had gone away. He could walk upstairs and see, if he liked. There was a young person lived in the top attic, she believed; but she was not sure, because she had only come in for an hour while her aunt helped the lady opposite to do her washing.

Dick did as he was told, and ascended the steep little stairs without an escort. When he got to the top, he found Hilary waiting for him on the threshold of her room. She had heard his voice in the hall.

"Nell has gone," she said at once.

"So I hear."

They both hesitated slightly, and then he went forward, determined that Nell's absence should not balk him of his cup of tea. Hilary made no difficulty about it. She was as anxious as he was for an interview. When she had shut the door and he saw her face with more light on it, he discovered that she had been crying. On the table lay a letter addressed and stamped. There were no tea things visible. To Dick's unaccustomed eyes the room looked as unfit for Hilary as a prison cell.

"What is the matter?" he said anxiously. "There is nothing wrong with Nell?"

"No. Nell has gone off with her husband quite happy."

"Then why are you so unhappy? Are you tired of living here alone? I hope you are."

The girl flushed at the appeal in Dick's voice and eyes. She took her purse out of her pocket and emptied its contents on the table—the five-pound note, the two sovereigns, and the little heap of silver.

"I have been wondering what I can do," she began. "This is all the money I have, and even this is yours."

It made Dick miserable to see her; she looked unnerved, like a person who has not recovered from a shock.

"What are you talking about?" he said. "What do you mean?"

"I have been to see Mr. Theodore this afternoon," she began. Then, finding it a little difficult to go on, she looked at Dick and found that she need not say another word. He understood, and his wrath blazed in his eyes.

"The mischief-making hound!" he cried.

"I think he was right to tell me."

"I don't agree with you."

"I wish we could make it up to you, Dick. Of course we never can—your goodness—but I will pay the five hundred pounds when I am twenty-five, and I must see what Nell thinks about the rest."

"So it has come to that," said Dick, looking deeply annoyed. "You would rather take money from Herr Hansen than from me."

"It is rather a question of Nell helping me to pay our father's debts," amended Hilary. "I hope I shall never have to take money from anyone. I mean to earn my own living."

"Why did you go and see Theodore this afternoon?"

Hilary was uncomfortably silent.

"If you won't tell me, I shall get it out of him. I mean to say a few words to him shortly."

"You can't ask Mr. Theodore questions about my business."

"Can't I?"

"It seems to me," said Hilary, "that everyone thinks it more his affair than mine to manage my life."

Dick looked expressively at the opposite wall.

"I have not had a chance yet," she continued, understanding that in his opinion she had so far not managed very well.

"Are you going to stay here?"

"No."

"What are you going to do?"

"I have found an engagement. That letter is to accept it."

"An engagement as what? Where is it? What are the terms?"

"Dick! You're not my keeper. No one has a right to interfere. Not Herr Hansen, and not you!"

"I have this much right," said Dick: "I have loved you ever since I knew you, and I still hope that you will be my wife."

How suddenly he made the great avowal again, and in how quiet a voice. Hilary's heart gave a leap as she listened, and out of all she wanted to say she could choose nothing. She stared at him as if she could hardly believe her ears.

"We have taken so much from you," she said finally. "We have injured you."

"Make it up to me, then," said Dick.

Hilary smiled, though her eyes were threatening tears.

"Will it make up?" she asked. "I feel as if it would be taking more and more. I have been so miserable without you, Dick."

A little later he took up the letter lying on the table and tore it into little pieces.

"Oh!" cried Hilary, "I never gave you leave to do that!"

"It is for you to ask my leave," he said, with a twinkle; "you are going to be my wife."

"But how can you afford to marry? Mr. Theodore says we have ruined you."

"That's my business, not yours. You shall never trouble your head about money again."

"Dick!" she said solemnly, "if you had been wise and gone away and taken this money, I should have had to sell this ring Nell gave me before I could pay my rent. Oh! how tired I am of it already, and I have only been here three months. What do girls do who have no one to fetch them away? I was going to be mother's help, you know, and have my meals in the kitchen."

"They would have turned you off in a week," said Dick, his grasp tightening on her hand.

"I dare say. I am one of the most useless creatures in existence, and not very strong, and not used to rough it. What becomes of such like, as a rule?"

"God knows!"

"Do you remember the line in 'Cymbeline,' Dick :

" ' Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered ' ? "

Dick did not remember it, but he considered a little, and then said in a persuasive voice :

"I don't see why we shouldn't be married next week."

Hilary stared. She had already imagined a wedding in Hamburg, possibly six months hence.

"I won't have you stay on here," he continued. "Nell was quite right. It is not fit for you. You look wretchedly ill. I could get away better now than later. We will go straight to the sea and live in a boat. We are both good sailors. Do be persuaded, Hilary! Why should we wait any longer? Why should you go away from me again? And if you stay anywhere here by yourself, you know the endless difficulties."

"But Nell," objected Hilary.

"Nell will understand. I will send her a wire this very moment. Oh! it won't reach her, as she is on her journey. Then we will wire to-morrow."

"You take for granted I don't want any smart clothes."

"Oh, there's time enough for that ! Where shall we go ? North or south ?"

"But it is impossible. We have not been engaged half an hour !"

"We have known each other for years. We have loved each other—how long?"

"Oh! a long time," sighed Hilary. "Why didn't you speak before, Dick?"

"WHAT!"

"In Hamburg, for instance, when you came to see us."

"I was full of business worries. I had not been to Australia. Besides—how was I to know you had changed your mind. Even to-day I feel very uncertain. But now, Hilary, say yes. I don't want to let you go again."

"We will go north," said Hilary, with shining, happy eyes, "far, far north, away from the Tottenham Court Road. I shall dream of the drip of the sea to-night, and of seaweed, and of cliffs dashed over with foam."

"And I shall dream of you," said Dick.

THE END.



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